"PRIVATE FOSTERING OF CHILDREN OF WEST AFRICAN ORIGIN IN ENGLAND"

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ABSTRACT.

This study considers the practice of placing West African children in private foster homes in England; a practice that can be traced to a history spanning over 50 years.

An initial search for relevant materials showed only limited research on this subject. The only study of significance on Private Fostering is that by Holman (1973). West African children in private foster care have remained a group largely out of the consciousness of social work professionals, mainly because the laws relating to children did not define social work professionals' roles and responsibilities to these children. However, the Children Act 1989 not only integrated private fostering into mainstream childcare legislation in England and Wales, it clearly defined the roles and statutory responsibilities of Local Authorities towards children who are, or are intended to be placed in private foster care.

Five years after this intended integration, this study was carried out to appraise the parenting of West African children in private foster care, and to ascertain how Local Authorities were carrying out these duties and responsibilities towards these children.

Thirty private foster carers were interviewed about their experiences and parental styles using open-ended interview guides. The interviews were transcribed and analysed using the NUD*IST computer software.

The principal findings of the study were that foster carers did not observe legal requirements to notify local authorities of private fostering placements; foster carers were taking in children at short notice without pre-placement inspections or assessments, and without much knowledge or information about them or their parents. Because carers knew little about the backgrounds of the children, they were bringing them up, as white children in predominantly white communities with no settled Black population. The study also found that there was a general lack of Social Services involvement in private fostering, and consequently their inability to satisfy themselves that the welfare of children privately fostered in their areas were safeguarded and promoted.

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I have been very fortunate in the course of this study to have had the help and support of many wonderful people along the way. Firstly I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my two supervisors; Professor David Quinton and Julie Selwyn both of the School for Policy Studies. Their guidance, support and understanding throughout the period of this research were instrumental to seeing me through to this end. I have benefited from your words of wisdom and demonstration of professionalism. You took to new heights the concept of 'Tutee-Tutor relationships.

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My gratitude is also extended to the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) who approved and recommended the research to their local Authority Social Services Departments in England and Wales. I would like to specifically thank those authorities that participated in the study either at the pilot stage or during the main study.

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attention you needed from a father. I would like to say that the benefit of this has been worth the troubles. Thank you for being there always.

All errors or omissions in the study are however my responsibility.

DEDICATION:

THIS STUDY IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORIES OF MY PARENTS **MR HALE SHEKARO LONGPET AND ANGELINA PADA LONGRIEM** WHO DIED ON THURSDAY 22nd JULY 1999 AND 3RD MAY 2001 RESPECTIVELY.

YOU ALWAYS WANTED ME TO ATTAIN THE BEST EVENTHOUGH THAT MEANT HAVING TO LEAVE YOU ALONE IN SICKNESS AND WITHOUT MY PRESENCE.

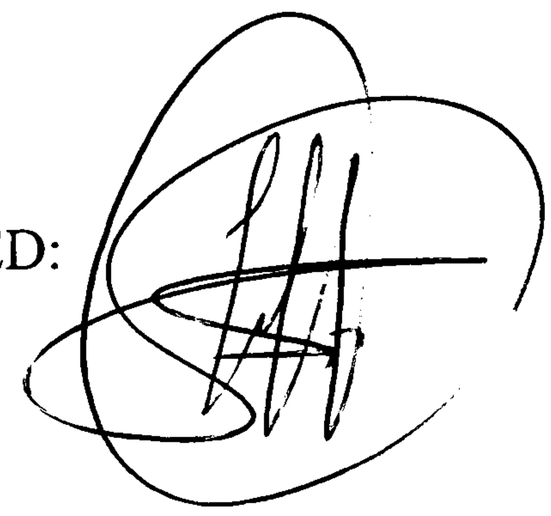
YOUR MEMORIES WILL REMAIN WITH US FOREVER.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION:

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original except where indicated by special reference in the text and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other degree.

Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University of Bristol.

The dissertation has not been presented to any other University for examination either in the United Kingdom or overseas.

SIGNED: 

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Introduction

This Study is on private fostering; in particular, private fostering of children of West African origin in England. Local Authorities according to the provisions of the Children Act 1989, "have a duty to satisfy themselves that the welfare of children who are privately fostered in their area is safeguarded and promoted, and that foster carers and premises are suitable." This statement can be said to have ushered in a new era for a form of childcare, which Bevan (1973) had referred to as the "Cinderella of English Family Law".

This study was conducted against the background of the intended integration of private fostering into mainstream childcare legislation in England and Wales following the enactment of the Children Act 1989. Most importantly this study was conducted against the dearth of information on the experiences of Foster carers and social work policy and practice relating to children who were in placements, or intended to be placed in private foster care in England. The integration of private foster care into mainstream childcare legislation meant, according to Volume 8 of the Guidance and Regulations to the Children Act 1989, that: - "Local Authorities will need to review their existing policies and practice in the light of regulations and guidance and give the same priority to these responsibilities as to other statutory duties."

The initial objectives of the research therefore was to examine Local Authorities' policies and social work practises toward children in private foster care, in line with these statutory responsibilities; and experiences of those who care for the children.

A useful starting point for any research interest in private fostering is of course Robert Holman's work in 1973.

Holman found in his research in 1973 that 60% of children in his sample of private fostering in the West Midland were of West African parentage. All were placed with white foster carers most of who had either been disqualified, or would not qualify as Local Authority foster carers. Subsequent works commissioned by the Department of Health, and recently the Social Services Inspection on private fostering (Signpost), have all highlighted the predominance of West African children in general and Nigerian children in particular constituting between 60-80% of the children in private foster care in England and Wales.

All of these pieces of research and experiences by social workers in the field have quite often expressed social work concerns in such areas as: -

- Absence of information about children and their parents,
- Child neglect,
- Racial and cultural identity issues and
- Rehabilitation issues when children have to return to their parents.

These conditions have in the past been associated with the absence of Guidance and Regulations which were expected to accompany past legislatures and which would have struck a balance between private (individual) and public (collective) responsibilities for this group of children.

While Local Authorities have in the past neglected this area of childcare on grounds of lack of adequate statutory responsibilities or duties, the present legislation has given clear guidelines and guidance on the responsibilities and roles of Local Authorities towards children in private foster care. The research will provide an important addition to the existing but (some dated) limited knowledge in this marginalised, low priority area of childcare.

The framework that informed the decision to undertake this research were set against the background of the followings:

Research commissioned by the Department of Health between 1988/89 in Kent found that whereas hitherto, discourse on private fostering had predominantly focused on Nigerian Student-families whose residence in the UK was intended to be relatively brief, 66 percent of the parents of the children in their sample, were permanently resident in Nigeria. Holman also found that there was a high incidence of children moving or being passed from one carer to another without the knowledge of the social services of the areas the children were being fostered. Subsequent small-scale researches in the 1980's have consistently confirmed Holman's earlier findings (Ellis 1975, Francis 1986 O'Donnell 1986; and Jervis, 1989.). Another area of concern was the finding that the physical and developmental needs of the children were not met due in part to the fact that most of the carers had no knowledge of the childrearing practices of West Africans. No care plans or pre-placement preparations were done prior to the arrival of the children into the respective homes. The scenario created by this findings was thus: - West African parents placed their children in White family homes through private arrangements without adequate arrangements as to the suitability of these carers; There was very little if any social work involvement. Papers presented by social workers in the field at conferences and seminars, all pointed to situation in various Local Authorities where West African children were privately fostered in conditions, which social workers said, 'Local Authority children could not be placed'. Successive researches have not only found that this was an area of child care that presented lots of practice problems, but that it was also by its nature, marginalised by the social work profession.

By the mid 1980s, private fostering had not only become a neglected and disturbing form of child care, but it had also become what one social commentator referred to as "the Cinderella of English Family Law". The neglect and marginalisation of private fostering

was sometimes masked by such arguments as the absence of regulations and guidance which would provide a balance between individual parent's right to provide for the care of their children. These concerns provided the backdrop against which the tone of the debate on the Children Bill was conducted in Parliament.

Following the most extensive and sustained public debate on private fostering in Parliament in 1989, the 'Cinderella of English Family Law' emerged with a social order- comprised of definitions and residual conditions; Conditions which are primarily meant to safeguard and promote the welfare of privately fostered children. These were subsequently published in Volume 8 of the Children's Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations.

The supposed integration of private fostering into mainstream child care legislation was intended to usher in a new era for private fostering as the Guidance and Regulations to the Act, stated that: -

> "Local authorities will need to review their existing Policies and Practices in the light of regulations and guidance and give the same priority to these responsibilities as to other statutory duties".

These responsibilities in summary are embodied in Section 67 (1) of the Children Act 1989, which states: -

> "It shall be the duty of every local Authority to satisfy themselves that the welfare of children who are privately fostered in their areas is safeguarded and promoted and to ensure that such advice is given to those caring for them as appears to the authority to be needed".

Emerging as they did from the findings of the various research that were conducted on the problems faced not only by professionals dealing with children in private foster care and concerns about the welfare of these children, the provisions and guidance were expected to address these concerns of professionals and officials in the field.

The main idea was to realign the discourse that had hitherto informed collective and individual responsibilities towards children in private foster homes and to focus such discourse on: -

- The right of children in private foster care to be nurtured and cared and for such rights to be framed within the realm of public responsibility;
- The formulation of a better balance between the responsibilities and relationships of individuals and state agencies.

In specific terms, what the Act sought was to define the conditions in a manner that extend the terms of reference under which parties to a private fostering arrangement would give prior notification to the state. It also sought to define the role of the state in investigating the suitability and capability of foster carers to meet the emotional and developmental needs of a particular child; State's recognition of the right of a privately fostered child to be nurtured and cared for in a manner and form that took account of the child's religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background.

The Research Objectives:

The overall research objective was to discover whether local Authorities have complied with the Regulations and guidance and/or implemented Section 67(1) of the Act; and the implications of their implementing these or not doing so, on the quality of the care that these children received from the Foster parents.

Specific objectives were:

a) Find out how many West African children were in private foster care in England and Wales at the time of the study.

b) What was the level of social work involvement in private fostering placements as measured by: -

- The existence, or otherwise, of a policy specifically for private fostering in the Local Authorities;
- The definition and profile of private fostering in these Local Authorities; and
- The relationship between the Social Services Departments and the natural parents of these children.

c) The conditions of the placements as measured by such index like-

- Pre-placement notifications and care plans;
- Suitability of carers and premises;
- Knowledge of the cultures and childrearing practices of West Africans by the carers;
- Motivations and parental styles of the carers;
- Discovering the support network and coping strategies of carers.
- Finding out about the relationships between the carers and Social Workers or the Social Services in general.

In fact, the overall goal was to match the practice of private fostering, the policies and practice relating to it, against the provisions of the Children Act 1989 and Volume 8 of the Guidance and Regulations to the Act.

The overall aims therefore was to find out the situation five years after private fostering was integrated into mainstream childcare legislature; and whether Local Authorities have

reviewed their policies and practice guidelines relating to private fostering to reflect the provisions of the Act.

Could Local Authorities be said to be "satisfying themselves that the welfare of privately fostered children in their area is safeguarded and promoted, and that foster carers and premises are suitable"?

CHAPTER ONE.

Public and Private Foster Care in England.

This chapter reviews the literature and research on child placements in both public and private spheres. Firstly in section one it briefly looks at the evolution of foster care as one of the most significant parts of the child welfare system; it reviews research on foster parents' motivations, contacts, and child welfare outcomes. The chapter also reviews and considers the contribution of case law and the general legal framework on children's rights.

Section two reviews the historical development of private fostering and previous research in this area. The contribution of case law in private fostering is also highlighted. Issues of re-unification of West Indian children reared in the Caribbean with their parents in the UK are also discussed and there is a brief comparison of private fostering placements with placements in boarding schools. The attachment and separation issues involved in child placements are also discussed in relation to Bowlby's attachment theory.

Finally, private fostering as a childcare strategy adopted by West Africans in England is discussed in the context of the Children Act 1989.

Section one.

Public childcare.

State involvement in the care of children in England and Wales has a rich and varied history (Hayden et al, 1999). The informal care of children by people who are not their biological parents, according to Triseliotis (1997), is as old as the history of mankind. Formal arrangements, sanctioned by legislation especially foster care are however, of a more recent origin. In Britain, the development of foster care has been closely associated with the policies and practices of the philanthropic, mostly religious organisations that emerged during the second half of the 19th century (Kahan 1979; Triseliotis 1997). Mainstream fostering as understood today can be traced to the Children Act 1948, which also provided for the setting up of Children's Departments, which over the years, have become present-day Social Services. Before then services were fragmented, piecemeal, and lacking coherence.

Part of the background to the 1948 Children Act was the concern generated by the experiences of those children evacuated during the Second World War. The evacuation process not only revealed the extent of social deprivation experienced by a large number of children; of concern also was what to do with children who could not be returned to their families. Concern regarding this situation, and the death of a foster child (Denis O'Neill) at the hand of a foster carer, led to the setting up of the Curtis Committee in 1945. The public outcry was to prove one of the defining moments in the childcare field (Hayden et al; 1999). The subsequent Monckton inquiry into the case found that social work training and supervision of foster carers was not only inadequate, but also that services lacked co-ordination.

The legislative culmination of this public concern was the 1948 Children Act. Out of this grew the determination to break with the past and provide greatly improved

services. This tried to promote a high priority to fostering; increased focus on inspection; and a focus on safeguarding the child's interests and the integration of children with the rest of society. However, the history of fostering arrangements suggests unease about how to develop a coherent framework that defines the conditions of responsibility for children looked after away from their family. This is particularly in circumstances where the care arrangements of children are subject to a division of responsibility between the children's parents and foster carers. It is also complicated in terms of what role(s) or sort of role the State should perform in either restricting or allowing adults the freedom to make child care arrangements.

In the UK, the culture of neglect punctuated by bouts of public concern based around spectacular if untypical cases has led to a chequered development of childcare policy. Emphases have ranged from the punishment of neglecting parents to efforts to help them through preventative policies (Kelly and Gilligan, 2000). Along side this have also been policies concerned with the detection of and protection of children from identified forms of abuse; the rescue of children from their parents; and at some other times returning them to their parents.

Is Private Fostering different From Public Fostering?

'It has not been widely realised according to Holman (1973 pp.1), 'that alongside local authority and voluntary society fostering, existed several thousand foster children placed in foster homes selected by their parents or guardians'. Though now covered by legislation under the Children Act 1989, private fostering as distinct from local authority fostering is little understood; even though Private fostering has been the subject of a number of pieces of legislation going as far back to the early Infant life Protection Act 1872 that resulted from the report of a select committee on the cases of several privately fostered children being murdered. However over the years, this form of childcare has been relegated to the fringe of childcare policies and practice in the United

Kingdom. This 'Cinderella' status of private fostering was amply exemplified in parliament in 1968 when the Prime Minister, in response to a question on private fostering, answered in terms of local authority childcare practices.

While similarities can be drawn between public and private fostering in terms of both sets of children being separated from their parents and placed with substitute parents, there are significant differences between the two types of fostering.

Firstly there are differences in the population in terms of the age at which the children are placed. The majority of children in private foster care are placed when they are infants, usually within a few weeks or months of birth; whereas in the public care system children are placed over a much wider age range, usually when there has been a breakdown in family relationships or when it is not safe to leave the child in the care of his/her birth family.

Secondly, in private fostering birth parents make a conscious and deliberate decision to place their children with particular foster carers, and keep contact with the children. This is on terms or conditions agreed by both. In the public care system however, children are placed by agencies of the state sometimes because parents are adjudged to be incapable of bringing up the child either in the short or long-term. Contact between the children and a parent in this regard is the product of negotiations and legal sanctions or some codified agreement. While parents in the private foster sphere can have contact with their children as and when they want, contacts between parents in the public care system are governed by practice guidelines and procedures which hinge on whether such contacts are in the interests of the child.

There is a similarity however in that birth parents can remove their children from placements whenever they feel like; however children who are the subject of care order can only be removed by order of the courts and/or official procedures. However, because privately fostered children are placed at a very young age and tend to stay longer than children in the public care system, they are more likely to enjoy more stable

placements than those in public care. Many children in public fostering come from troubled families or backgrounds, and these have the tendency to affect the stability of placements as they have been found to move more frequently or experience more placement breakdowns (Berridge, 1997, Skuse and Ward, 2000, and Triseliotis, 1989). Finally carers' motivations for fostering also differ. Although research on motivation in both types of fostering have shown that carers are overwhelmingly motivated by altruistic factors (Adamson, 1973, Dando and Minty, 1987Fanshel, 1966, and Holman, 1973, Prosser, 1978,), these have only been defined generally such as 'wanting to look after children' 'love of children' or 'wanting to help unfortunate children'. In private fostering carers decide the age and gender of the children they foster as they can pick and chose which child to foster. Past studies on private foster care, (Holman, 1973, Save the Children, 1988/89 and 1997, SSI, 1994, and CRE, 1993) have found that almost all private foster placements are transracial and carers usually only foster infants within six months of birth. Thus their expressed need to look after "babies". In the public care system however, foster carers' altruism is limited and governed by the fact that children of all ages can be placed with them as they are approved for particular ages and there is a high premium on financial reward to carers.

Today in the UK foster care has become the preferred placement for 'out of home care' (Colton and Williams, 1997). It has truly become the 'work horse' of child welfare systems. Two principal placements for children in the last century have been residential care and foster care. There has grown the notion that foster care with its family setting, is more likely to be able to provide the conditions for the growth of alternative attachments than residential care with its institutionalised structures.

This 'common sense' view of what is good for children has thus made professionals to perceive foster care as more child-centred. Colton (1988) argues that the bureaucratisation of residential care provision was responsible for its decline in addition to what Robertson and Robertson (1967/68) described as the direct and

powerful application of attachment theory especially in relation to young children. These processes have been accelerated by wider social changes and pressures that Colton and Hellinckx (1993) argued, reflected: -

i. The general decline in institutional provisions in post-industrial societies.

ii. It became increasingly difficult and expensive to deliver the conditions in which attachment relationships and normal relations can flourish in residential settings.

iii. In the case of Britain confidence in residential care had been severely shaken by a series of abuse scandals involving physical and sexual abuse in homes run by both religious orders and the state agencies.

Thus we have seen the proportion of children in foster care in England doubled over the last 20 years and those of residential care dropped even more drastically.

Warren (1997) reported that up to 40,000 children and young people are in foster care placements in any given day; with thousand more moving in and out of foster care during the course of a year. Foster care has therefore become the most important placement option for looked after children in the UK.

However, despite foster care being increasingly promoted as the 'preferred' option for children and young people looked after, there have been few detailed studies about the nature of fostering and its impact (Triseliotis, 1989, p5).

Childcare and Welfare outcomes. A continuing strand of research interest in the UK over the last decade has been the measurement of outcomes of such services. The focus has shifted as different aspects of service-provision have become the cause of concern or as new questions have been highlighted. Although that much is known about outcomes in the public care system, there is virtually nothing known about outcomes in private fostering either in the short or long-terms. Whatever outcome measures have been found or described in various literature or research, have mainly

been within the public care domain. This is indicative of the state of research in the field.

A brief overview of foster care outcome studies over the last 30 years suggests that many children benefit from family foster care (Berridge, 1997, George, 1970, Parker, 1966, Trasler, 1960,). Much depends on the type of placement and its aims and how and at what stage outcomes are measured.

The issues that have often been debated about the measurement of outcomes in foster care are: -

- When are outcomes to be assessed?
- What measures are to be used as indicators of outcomes, of success or failure?
- What should the outcomes be compared with?

Success has often been measured by the absence of breakdown in the placement. Short-term placements, those meant to last for up to about three months, have lower breakdown rates than those meant to last for over two years (Berridge, 1997, Sellick and Thoburn, 1996, Triseliotis, 1989). Rowe et al's (1989) work that looked at a broad range of placements has often been quoted as the principal and most comprehensive study of short-term foster care in Britain. This study found that when all ages and types of placements were taken together, just half lasted as planned over the three-year period. They concluded that short-term foster care was successful in meeting the aims of temporary or emergency care, just as Berridge and Cleaver (1989) also reported high level of success in short-term foster care as they found that only 10 per cent of short-term placements ended in breakdown within their short-term time span. Studies of long-term foster care have concentrated on measuring the rate of 'breakdown' and factors that appeared to be associated with the 'failure' or survival of placements.

In the United Kingdom older studies by Parker (1966) and George (1970), provide the most widely known and quoted. The main findings and areas of agreement in these two studies were:

- Approximately a half of long-term foster placements fail.
- The older children are at placement; the most likely is placement failure.
- The presence of foster carers' own children near in age to the foster child makes breakdown more likely.

Subsequent studies have supported these findings, and also show that rates of placement disruption varied from study to study and according to the time scales considered. However all large-scale studies have found rates heading towards 50 per cent breakdown within 5 years especially for older children (Berridge and Cleaver, 1989).

Collectively these studies indicate that breakdown rates have changed little over the years, although more children and young people facing an increasing range of difficulties experience fostering placements (Rowe et al. 1984, 1989). Butler and Charles (1999) also noted that factors associated with fostering outcomes are rarely supported by more than two studies. A series of child, birth parents and foster placement-related factors have however been found to operate with all types of fostering. Placement success is more likely where birth parents and social workers are in consistent contact with the child (Aldgate 1977; Berridge and Cleaver 1987), and placement disruption is less likely when carers have been adequately prepared, trained and supported (Cautley 1980; Berridge & Cleaver 1987; and Strathclyde 1988) and are able to include the birth families in the placement (Thorpe 1974; Triseliotis 1980; Berridge and Cleaver 1987). Some evidence to date however suggests that the best predictor of placement breakdown is previous breakdown (Berridge 1997).

A number of points can then be drawn from the discussion on foster care outcomes. These are: -

i. Short-term placements were less likely to end prematurely;
ii. Breakdowns in long-term foster care is likely especially if the children are older when placed;

iii. Factors associated with breakdown have remained fairly stable through 30 years of research but insufficient account is taken of this when placements are made.

iv. Even though private fostering has existed side-by-side with public care, no research to measure outcomes has been done.

Carers' Motivations and Placement Outcomes. Despite a good deal of evidence relating to the general characteristics of foster carers, there has been only very limited examination of their motivations for fostering. In the few studies that have attempted to assess foster carers' reasons for fostering, motives have been very generally defined and include, for example- 'like looking after children'; 'want to do good to someone'; 'wish to help children'; responses which are 'too vague to be meaningful' according to Prosser (1978). Underlying these explicit motives are often reasons such as the wish to replace children who have married or left home (Adamson 1973). Prosser (1978, p32) concluded that 'motivation may be hidden and not easily identified but could well have major implications for the success or otherwise of placements'.

Dando and Minty (1987) in a study assessing what makes good foster parents came to similar conclusions as Parker (1978) and Fanshel (1966). Fanshel had shown that foster carers were motivated to foster by five factors. These were; (1) the warmth they felt for children, (2) their identification with the underdog, (3) the desire to put their religious beliefs into action, (4) their need to control and direct others, and (5) their enjoyment of the challenge of a difficult task. Apart from these cited studies, current childcare studies either on outcomes or reasons for breakdowns have said little about carers' motivations. The need for more research on this has become imperative in view of the genuine anxiety about the future supply of foster carers and foster services. Finally, it can safely be concluded that considerable altruism still exists among the

many thousands of foster carers who commit themselves to meeting the needs of vulnerable children throughout the UK.

Contacts in foster care placements. The effect of continued contact of foster children with their birth families has long been an area of contention in foster care. According to Kelly and Gilligan (2000), 'it has been an area where pro and anti arguments have been developed from value positions, using attachment theory and research findings' (Kelly and Gilligan, 2000. P77). The issue is seen in terms of whether children are more likely to prosper in substitute care if they retain contact and relationship with their birth families or whether it is better for them to have a fresh start and commit themselves wholly to their foster parents.

Research findings suggest that partnership, in respect of both parental contact during placement and the relationships made between social workers and foster carers, is a crucial underpinning of both quality and continuity of placement (Millham et al 1986; Cliffe an Berridge 1991; Berridge 1997). These assertions arising from accumulated research evidence have shown that the well being of children cared for in short-term foster care (where the intention is for the children to return home), is enhanced if they maintain links with birth parents and other family members.

However the most alarming aspect of these research findings was the low level of contact between children in care and their birth parents. Family contact was given little consideration (Vernon & Fruin 1986; Packman et al, 1986) by social workers and little practical help was offered to encourage parents to visit.

Millham et al (1986) found that three-quarters of the 450 children they studied had difficulties at the outset of their entry into care in maintaining contact with parents. Rowe et al (1984) observed that restrictions were often imposed which seemed to set up barriers against contact by birth parents. Firstly, discouraging visits to enable the children settle and secondly, after a long gap arguing that starting renewed visiting

would be upsetting. This situation was seen as making parents feel that they were unwanted and had nothing more to contribute to the well being of their children (Millham et al 1986).

Thoburn's intensive and extensive studies of permanent placements (1986/1990) both show that family links which children wished to maintain were not always preserved. Similarly Thoburn and Rowe (1988) showed in their survey of permanent placements that when other variables were held constant, fewer placements broke down when family links were maintained. Wedge and Mantle (1991) found that children were more likely to be protected against the adverse effects of long periods in care if they maintained links with their birth families. They concluded that the increasing trend toward access of family members to children in care needs to be further developed and extended if placements in substitute families are to be successful, and if children are to acquire and retain the self –identity which is a crucial component of emotional development. In permanent or long-term foster care the issue is seen as more complex than it seems. Quinton et al (1997) argued that recent study of long-term foster care with data on contact and breakdown (for example Berridge and Cleaver 1987) shows little differences in breakdown rates between children with no contact and those with little contact with birth parents, as the differences were not statistically significant. Quinton and colleagues (1997) could find no evidence in the studies reviewed that contact improved the adjustment or intellectual attainment of children in adoptive placements; and therefore concluded that in encouraging parental contact in permanent placements we are engaged in a 'social experiment' rather than evidence-based practice. Berridge and Cleaver (1987) also noted an 'anti-family ideology' in some instances and more general lack of encouragement of contact which meant that family links were too often allowed to wither and die.

A role for social workers is to support parents to keep in touch with their children, since research has shown that social work support is a significant factor in

preventing the loss of parental contact (Aldgate, 1980; Millham et al., 1986). The maintenance of contact between children in care and their birth parents is important because of the likely adverse effect that lack of contact can have in terms of the social isolation of children on leaving the care system (Stein and Carey, 1986). Thoburn et al (1986) showed that for older children, on leaving the care system or if placements breakdown they are likely to look for permanence with their own families.

Because of the high rate of care drifts often experienced by many children in care; contact provides a source of stability against the negative effects of constant changes of placements. Contact can be an important arena in which to assess parent-child attachment and parental skills (Fahlberg, 1994). Finally however, this area of practice (like many others) is still driven by value changes in social work and wider society, and legislation, and by policy changes with an uncertain research base. Whether continued contact produces better long-term results for children, this still needs further research.

Attachment and Separation in foster care: The Issues. The basis of attachment theory is that human beings are born with a predisposition to form relationships. In Bowlby's view 'the propensity to make strong emotional bonds to particular individuals is a basic component of human nature already present before birth' (Bowlby 1988). These bonds provide a sense of security to the infant. The denial or disruption of the relationships, which provide this protection and the associated sense of loss of security, can cause the infant extreme anxiety. Originally developed by John Bowlby in 1951, the essence of Bowlby's thesis was to explain the effect of inadequate maternal care during early childhood and the effect on young children of separation from those they know and loved. Although published over four decades ago, its concepts and policy recommendations have continued to excite controversy. Fahlberg (1991) also contributing to the debate, in her own way defines attachment as the affectionate bond between two individuals that endures through time and space and

serves to join them emotionally. Providing physical and psychological safety and security seem a basic parental task for all those that provide care for young children. Distortions and inadequacies in these early caregiving relationships would mean that the organisation of the self, which is crucial at that stage, becomes distorted or incoherent.

The knowledge and theory that many practitioners and professionals in the childcare field use to understand and plan actions in relation to family and childcare problems have derived from varied sources and disciplines. In the case of substitute family care the key questions are to do with the nature of children's needs and how these can be met within placements available (Kelly & Gilligan, 2000). Common to all needs of children is the need for 'love and security' and their need to be attached to at least one consistent caring and loving adult (Fahlberg 1994, Pringle, 1975).

Attachment theory has grown to explain children's need for attachment, the process by which they develop these attachments and the consequences if these processes go wrong (Bowlby 1979; Rutter 1980). While for most children their attachment figures are their parents, for children removed into care, this most basic of needs may be threatened, especially if the child had been removed because these needs had not been adequately met within the family. In this case and for these groups of children the responsibility for seeing that these needs are met lies with those professionals in the childcare field. As the mortality rate declined, and as societies have become more affluent, children's attachment needs have assumed a central importance in childcare policy and practice (Kelly & Gilligan 2000). Bowlby's view that disrupted attachment without compensating stabilising experiences in childhood leads to unhappiness and often the development of antisocial behaviour has received widespread acceptance. Thus attachment theory has become the key theoretical perspective informing childcare decision –making (Fahlberg 1994, Rutter 1980). Debate has however continued on how best to secure children's attachment relationships both in the development of agency policies on child placements and in individual cases.

Fahlberg (1991) argues that children in foster placements cannot make optimum use of their placements until they have resolved their grief. This is because 'unresolved separation may interfere with the development of new attachments' (Fahlberg, 1991. pp160). Evidence from the work of Fahlberg (1988) and Jewett (1984), indicated that it is not separation per se, but the context and circumstance of separation and loss that is important to the long term effects of such a move. Rutter (1981) observed that a child who is well attached to a caregiver could more easily develop attachment to others. The child's strong attachment to one person is believed to ease the development of attachment to others. This is a crucial factor to foster carers looking after West African children because the child in care can be helped to form strong and healthy attachment to his foster carer and then to extend same to his/her natural parents when the time comes to return home. The most important thing to note here is not just the formation of any attachment, but the quality and continuity of care that these children receive in early childhood. It is this that determines the effect of separation from the attachment figure.

Although children in foster care face the same developmental challenges as other children, the secure base for this development is frequently lacking because of inadequacies in their early attachment experiences. So when moving into care, children are generally faced with forming new attachments to their carers; the nature of the attachment varying according to the purpose of the placements, and the needs of the child (Aldgate and Simmonds, 1988). Foster care's flexibility in providing substitute attachment figures is important, as the plan is often to rehabilitate the child to his/her birth family. Foster care in this sense can then be seen as an extension of the child's attachment relationships rather than as a disruption. Thus foster care can be used to diminish the trauma of separation and disrupted relationships for children in public care because of its capacity to aid the children to form attachment relationships with a number of people from the earliest age (Schaffer & Emerson, 1964).

SECTION TWO

PRIVATE FOSTERING.

Definition of private foster care.

Section 66 (1)(a) and (b) of the Children Act 1989 defines private fostering arrangements in this way:

(a) "a private fostered child" means a child who is under the age of 16 and who is cared for, and provided with accommodation by, someone other than-

(i) a parent of his;

(ii) a person who is not a parent of his but who has parental responsibility for him; **or**

(iii) a relative of his; **and**

(b) " to foster a child privately," means to look after the child in circumstances in which he is a privately fostered as defined by this section.

A child is not privately fostered if the person caring for and accommodating him: -

(a) has done so for a period of less than 28 days; and

(b) does not intend to do so for any longer period.

Despite this clarification within the Children Act 1989, confusion remains around 'when', and 'why' those who practice this kind of childcare do it. Whilst it is acknowledged that private fostering can be used by people from various backgrounds (REU 1993), the focus here is on the use of private fostering by parents of West African origin.

There is no way of knowing precisely when West African parents began placing their children in private foster care in Britain, but a good guess has often been given as

1955 when the first recorded advertisement for a foster home was by a Nigerian family in a magazine called 'Nursery World' (Holman, 1973, Biggs, 1978, Nesbitt and Lynch, 1992, Watson, 1977, and REU, 1993). In 1956, the magazine established a regular Homes Wanted column which according to Joshua (1991), was comprised largely of advertisements placed by Nigerians. Table 1.1 shows the number of advertisements placed from the mid-1950s to the end of 1985.

Table.1.1 Advertisements requesting homes for West African children.

Years	**Number of Advertisement.**
1956- 60.	460
1966-70	6,700
1971-75	3,000
1979-83	2,500
1984-1988	3,311

Source: *Laurie Joshua (1991) 'Private Fostering - A Migrant Worker's Dilemma' in African Woman: autumn 1991.*

Although the magazine stopped carrying the adverts in 1990, Joshua (1991) argued that the above statistics provided only a glimpse and guide to the trend. These statistics did not take account of children who were placed in private foster homes via an informal network - by which parents are put in touch with established and prospective foster carers - without having to go through the process of advertising in a magazine.

Concerns about the practice are illustrated in the following headlines which have sought to draw attention to the issue: 'Trading in Children'; 'The African Child in Britain'; 'Scrubbing their faces hoping white will appear'; 'Cashing in on the Hopes of Black Children'; 'Stolen Childhood'; 'Babies for Cash'; and many others.

The British have often linked the migration of West African people to Britain to colonialisation. This created an economic dependence, which resulted in a significant number of West Africans coming to the United Kingdom in the 1950s to study in order to return to fill administrative posts in governments (Atkinson and Horner, 1990, p20). The major and most far-reaching change in these societies as a result of colonialisation and the thrust to modernisation has been in the economic structure of the society. Where

previously nearly everyone farmed, and chiefs and citizens shared much the same life-styles, 'by the mid-twentieth century, an occupationally differentiated and clearly stratified social system was emerging' (Goody and Muir, 1977 p.155). Privilege was no longer the result of landed property as was in the past, but rather followed mainly from income attached to occupations in the modern sector of the economy. Thus the key to occupational mobility was education.

Centuries of western trade, followed by Christianity and colonial rule have set in motion processes which in turn have led to the flow of West Africans seeking qualifications in England and other parts of the world. Viewed against the situation where higher educational qualifications was the key to occupations carrying the greatest rewards in both wealth and prestige, it is understandable why newly independent countries of West Africa sent their citizens to the United Kingdom to acquire professional and technical qualifications. Training in Britain was therefore not only for an occupational career, but also for entry into the governing echelon of these newly independent countries.

The Colonial Office in 1955 attempted to address problem of isolation, loneliness and racism experienced by West African students by allowing their wives and children to join them in the United Kingdom, to provide companionship that was thought would alleviate these problems. This 'family group' became a new enduring feature of the West African students' experience in Britain (Race Equality Unit, 1993 pp9). One must note here the differences in the nature of immigration into the United Kingdom between people from the West Indies or Caribbean and those who came from West Africa. While the Africans came mainly to acquire educational qualifications and then returned to fill positions in the newly emerging nations that were gaining political independence in the late fifties and early sixties, many West Indian immigrants came mainly to work in the 'mother' country. The majority of those who came from the Caribbean initially came alone and left their children back home to be looked after by

either the grandparents or other relatives and kin. The issues associated with the reunification of these children and their parents in the UK are discussed later in the chapter.

There were no major research data available about private fostering until Holman (1973) published his study "Trading in children: a study of private fostering". Drawing his sample from the notified cases of Children's Departments in the West Midlands on a given date in 1968, he compared them with a matched sample of local authority children. The information was gathered to look for commonalities between the two groups. Comparisons by age and nationality showed that 60% of the 143 children in private foster care had parents of West African origin. The West African children were fostered at much younger age than their local authority counterparts and they were predominantly in the under-five age group. However, a comparison with children in Local Authority care did not present similar trends. Holman found the main reason West African parents placed their children in private foster care was that they were students. This factor will be discussed in conjunction with others later in the chapter.

On the suitability of foster carers, the study found that there were concerns about unsuitability in 63 percent of the placements. Many of the carers had either had their application to foster for local authorities turned down, or had been convicted of child neglect or even of child assault. They also included people whose children were in public care but who had gone on to foster through private arrangements. Other concerns were: two-thirds of the children were placed without prior meeting with foster carers; Carers were frequently coping with difficult children who were likely to display extreme and consistent aggression, anxiety or withdrawal. In terms of social work support to foster carers, 15 percent of placements had not been visited at all at the time of the study; while 66 percent were visited less than five times. Birth parents were rarely contacted by the social workers. The study concluded that given this scenario, private fostering was relegated to the fringe of childcare services. It also provided a

glimpse of the socio-economic characteristics of the foster carers. Foster carers were in the age range thirty-one to sixty years, but mostly in the over sixty range; they were more likely to be married and most would have had children of their own; they were more likely to be heavily weighted toward the partly skilled and the unskilled occupational class.

The study attempted to explain why West African parents chose this kind of childcare placement. It showed that many of the parents were students either on scholarships or had meagre financial incomes. Secondly due to low income housing was poor, and thirdly the eligibility criteria imposed by some Social Services Departments for local authority placements or Day Nurseries tended to exclude West African parents. The pressures the situation imposed on these students led many of them to seek cheaper ways of caring for their children or of supplementing their incomes.

Ellis (1971) sees West African students' readiness to foster their children privately as due to cultural practices. She noted that fostering was a widespread traditional practice in West Africa, and not merely something which parents resort to in times of crisis. However, Mama (1984) argued that although fostering is widespread in West Africa, there is an undesirable tendency of outsiders to over-emphasise the role of West African culture when considering the use of private fostering by this group. She argued that West African mothers are fully aware that sending their young children to English families is not the same thing as sending them to live with a close and trusted relative (which in any case, occurs when they are older). She argues that the difficulties in housing, and employment, along with the pressures of study, the lack and expense of day-care facilities have led many West African student-parents to have their children privately fostered.

Viewed within a European frame of reference, this readiness to place children in private foster care rather than choose other alternatives may seem puzzling. Joshua (1991) suggests that parents may choose private fostering because they see it as a purely

temporary measure, the rationale being that it would provide interim care for their children and on completion of their studies, the parents and their children would return to their home country.

The use of the term 'interim' would suggest that the arrangements made with foster carers are intended to be transitory. But as Holman (1973, p168) notes, the various pressures facing overseas students led to many of them extending the time spend pursuing their studies in Britain. Stapleton (1978) argued that whilst the intention might initially have been to return with the children to West Africa, the placement of children with White families for extended periods could not in the literal sense be considered a temporary measure. Indeed to the outside observers, it could be difficult to understand how parents who profess to love their children can then choose not to be involved in day-to-day caring for a period of several years.

The issue of West African children in private foster care, have often raised a number of questions about West Africans generally in Britain: Who they are, Why are they willing to let other people rear their children if they care so much about them? Do West Africans have a different conception of parenthood from the British? Why do other immigrant or minority populations not resort to the same childcare strategies?

Childcare issues:

In western societies, the nuclear family is the institution that provides for the majority of physical, developmental and emotional needs of children. Children who are cared for in settings other than their family are usually regarded as disadvantaged. This when compared to West African context, becomes narrow and Eurocentric in its application. In West Africa all children are in a sense, everybody's children, or at least the concern of a great number and range of relatives. Considerably less emphasis is placed on the individual mother's role in the socialisation of the child (Ware 1978; cited in Biggs 1978, p.83).

In West Africa there is a diffuse sharing of children among kin groups unlike the exclusive parent-child relationship known in Britain. It is not unusual within the concept of shared responsibility for a child to be sent to live with relatives perhaps because they are able to give the child the opportunity to benefit from a higher standard of living or learn skills. Such practices are seen as a normal part of the socialisation process in West Africa as we shall see in Chapter Two, and are required 'as a means by which family members help one another' (Stapleton 1978). In Britain foster care is considered to be a poor substitute for the care given by a child's birth parents, although it is accepted that this is a better alternative than residential care. When we therefore consider the usage of the term 'fostering' as has just been stated in terms of kinship and as a natural process of socialisation, we can then begin to understand the difficulties faced by West Africans when seeking appropriate child care during their stay in Britain.

Goody and Muir (1977) argued that an English couple confronted with a similar set of role conflicts as West African student parents faced, would almost certainly resolve them by the wife giving up her studies to care for the children. Even if there is an aunt or a grandmother nearby to look after the children while the mother works part-time, she (the mother) is expected to be ready to give up her career for her children's sake if there is a conflict between requirements of the two. This is not the case in West Africa according to McCall (1961), who said that despite the much larger families, the working mother is the norm, and it is unusual to find mothers who are not involved in some kind of gainful occupation.

West African mothers have often overcome their childcare problems through the practice of child fostering among kin members. Having children presented few difficulties as they are considered a community responsibility and as such, are welcomed anywhere. Thus the student would come to Britain with barely any knowledge of the culture in the belief that, as the country was a 'welfare state', they would be given all the assistance they required (Ellis, 1976). In practice however, they

found the experience very different to their expectations. Some having approached social workers for help in making arrangements for taking care of their children whilst they studied, would discover that Day Care Services were not available to them because their needs did not come within the local authority terms of reference as the children had two parents who could look after them.

As Stapleton (1978) comments, " it is hard for a mother to accept that in this advanced country, with universal free education and health, a day nursery place is not available, and is only likely to be so if her whole family is at the verge of breakdown" (Stapleton, 1978 pp.65). In addition, normal childminding and day care hours (i.e. 9am-5pm) often fall short of students' needs in terms of study schedules and college class timetables. The students were therefore left with little choice but to turn to fostering (which has traditionally been the way out of childcare problems), as a method of caring for their children whilst they completed their studies.

Private fostering thus not only allows the child to be looked after by others while freeing the parents to concentrate on their studies, it also allows the parents additional flexibility to work long unsociable hours and increase their earning capacity (Nesbitt and Lynch, 1992). Furthermore, private fostering becomes attractive when one considers that the carer relieves the mother of all the care of the child for about half the child minders' fees (Biggs 1978). Stapleton argues that West African parents feel no more guilt when placing their children in private foster care than do English parents who seek boarding schools for their children. But while comparisons may be drawn on the basis that in both cases the children are living separately from their parents, here the similarities end. Parents who send their children to boarding schools have usually put considerable thought and efforts into choosing the one they feel will best suit their child's educational and social needs. Visits would have been made, information sought and possibly the child's opinion asked for before the decision is made. Then there is the question of age; children who are sent away to school do not often go before the age of

seven, and many do not board until considerably later. To that extent, boarding schools cannot be likened to the practice of sending children to live with private foster carers within a few weeks or months of their birth, their carers having been found through informal networks, or the placing of advertisements in magazines, shop windows or newspapers.

In a postal survey study of 21 private foster placements Save the Children (1988/89) found that not only was the quality of care unsatisfactory, but that some of the carers were over 70 years old; some had had children who had been taken into care by the local authority, or had convictions for offences relating to cruelty to children. Of the 21 placements, only four had been notified in advance; eleven were notified after placements while six were never notified at all. No assessments had been made of all placements at the time of the study. A follow up postal survey of 13 Social Services Departments revealed similar findings. This latter finding showed that Social Services had no information about birth parents; these children were treated as objects; there were rampant cases of child neglect as a result of inadequate care. Evidence was shown of children showing signs of lack of verbal stimulation, educational underachievement, and behavioural difficulties especially among those children who had experienced multiple placements.

The Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) commissioned a study conducted by Save the Children's African Family Advisory Services (AFAS) in 1993 (but published in 1997). This study aimed to look at "policy and practice towards private Fostering". It was based on a sample of three local authorities deliberate selected because they had specific local interests in the subject and were at different stages developing local practice for private fostering. The sample consisted of eight cases of private foster placements, interviews with 42 social workers and 52 health Visitors. The issues that emerged from the study reflected the findings of a national inspection of private fostering published in 1994. But it however noted especially the poor quality of care

children were receiving especially in the ability of the carers to meet the racial, cultural, and religious or linguistic needs of the children. Finally the study expressed concern about the inability of the Children Act 1989 framework to solve these problems of notification, contact with birth parents and planning and decision-making for this group of children. It however highlighted areas of good practice found in some areas especially in the area of developing partnerships with foster carers and the wider community to support the practice.

Although these were localised studies and small-scale in nature, they revealed similar findings and concerns to those of Holman's pioneering study. The national inspection of private fostering by the Social Services Inspectorate (Signpost) in 1994, set out to inspect the arrangements for private fostering against the requirements of the Children Act 1989, and also to identify examples of good practice in private fostering. Although the findings from the inspection were based on a very small sample from three areas, and general conclusions could not be drawn from these, the findings are relevant as pointers to how local authorities were handling issues relating to this largely unknown aspect of the childcare field. The general conclusions from the inspection were:

(i) Information about private fostering and requirement to notify local authorities of placements was virtually unknown to the general public;

(ii) Arrangements for private fostering were not in place in all three Social Services Departments to the extent that managers and staff were unaware or not conversant with legislation, regulations and guidance and/or confused about the action to be taken.

(iii) Potentially vulnerable children were being placed in the care of strangers, without any checks being undertaken as to their suitability to care for the child;

(iv) The actual number of children was unknown, and finally

(v) The way in which some placements being made raised some very serious concerns about the welfare of the children.

The shortcoming of all the studies cited lies in the absence of the birth parents' perspectives. None gave accounts of why birth parents chose private fostering. Most other small-scale studies or commentaries have been based on anecdotal evidence rather than on study of parental motives and objectives in placing their children in private foster care.

Goody and Muir's (1982) study of marital roles and the fostering of West African children in England, had as its central focus, to find out whether the fostering of children by West African families was a response to situational constraints, an adaptation of traditional pattern of child rearing to new circumstances. One dimension examined was the effect of marital role structure and role stress on decisions to foster children in England by West African families. They found that couples with decidedly joint marital role structure rarely fostered their children, while couples with segregated roles more frequently did. Faced with the constraints of studies, jobs and childcare, couples with joint marital roles exhibited a high level of co-operation. Whereas in the situation where each parent was struggling for his or her 'rights', children represented an added complication, and fostering thus a welcome solution.

The researchers could not say whether segregated marital roles led to the decision to foster and whether the stress-free relationship experienced by joint marital role families in themselves prevented them from fostering. It became difficult to assess the relative importance of other factors such as sub-standard housing, pressure of study, wives attempts to work or earn a qualification and their contribution toward the decision to foster a child.

NEW TRENDS IN PRIVATE FOSTERING

More recently private fostering has been used not only by students but also by the increasing number of West Africans who seek work in Britain or are permanently residents in their home countries. Save the Children found (1989) in a survey conducted of 209 children received into local authority foster care in one area division who had previously been privately fostered in 1986, sixty six percent of the parents were permanent residents in Nigeria.

The policy of West African governments towards training in the professions had by the mid 1970s and 1980s, radically changed according to Goody and Muir (1982). This is associated with the opening of a number of new universities and professional schools that had made it possible to be fully qualified either as doctor or lawyer without leaving most West African countries. Perhaps a more significant factor of restraint on the number seeking to train abroad had been the scarcity of government employment for those with higher qualifications in West Africa.

Both political and economic difficulties in the region by the mid 1980s meant that their economies were set on a severe downward trend, resulting in a sharp decline in government revenue and consequently, the number of students from West Africa seeking qualification in the UK. More so, tuition fees for overseas students were excessively raised in 1982.

Home Office Immigration and Naturalisation Departmental records showed that of the 109,000 entries granted to Nigerians in 1989, less than 1,000 were students. Economic problems and the Structural Adjustments Programmes (SAP) introduced by most West African countries meant that there have been changes among the families who seek private foster homes for their children. There has now been instead, an increase in the number of working parents, parents travelling between two countries, and parents permanently remaining in West Africa who use private foster placements (REU, 1993

p.9). Furthermore, academic calendars in these countries have been very erratic with most institutions of learning remaining closed for most parts of the year. Nesbitt and Lynch thus conclude that:

> 'The rapid changes that are taking place in Africa can mean that today's visitor or student becomes tomorrow's asylum seeker; Economic pressures converts today's bone fide student to tomorrow's economic migrant, political instability changes today's president to tomorrow's refugee'. (Nesbitt and Lynch, 1992, p1403).

The alternative has been for well-off families who can afford the airfares, to invest in their children's future by removing them from such countries and privately fostering them in the United Kingdom. Fostering the children in the UK may ensure that the child's future would be guaranteed, especially given the availability of welfare provisions in health and education. The irony of this situation is that while during the colonial period, and right up to the early 1960s, White middle class families employed Black working class women to look after their children or serve as house maids in the colonies, the reverse is now the case where middle class or well-off Black West African families employ working class White families to care for their children while they either work or engage in full time education in the UK. Some of the Black families are even away in West Africa and only come occasionally to visit their children, while for most of the time the foster carers have absolute control over how they care for the children.

Reunification of West Indian children with their parents in the UK.

Questions have often been asked about the over-representation of West African children in the population of those migrant or minority groups in the UK who use private fostering as a solution to their childcare problems. Even though there is a large Caribbean population in the UK, who may also be experiencing childcare problems little has been known about their use of private fostering.

Any discussion on the issues affecting the socialisation of West Indian children in Britain entails an understanding of the patterns of immigration of this group to Britain.

From the beginning of West Indian migration to the UK there was a high proportion of women who arrived with one or more children. Most children were however left behind with grandparents, aunts, and other adults within the extended family, and money was often sent towards their upkeep.

So West Indian families would have faced similar problems faced by West African student families in terms of childcare as well. In the absence of formal government efforts to assist families, West Indian families would also have explored and adopted strategies for coping and surviving under difficult social and economic condition (Ellis 1985). But while West African families tried to overcome their childcare problems by making private fostering arrangements with White families, West Indian families left their children with relatives back in the Caribbean or sent them back there while they remained in the UK to work.

Perhaps the most obvious problem West Indian families faced (and may still be facing today), was in the nature of the attachment relationships between parents and child when reunited after a long period of separation; as significant number of the children did not accompany their parents to Britain (Arnold 1997). The issue has been the child's relationship with the substitute caregiver during parental absence, and the re-establishment of ties to biological parents during reunification. The result of this process can be damaging to the family equilibrium and happiness of the family. The initial loss of attachment and the re-establishment of ties with parents may pose persistent problems for young children. Many may not have been prepared for the separation from their parents and may therefore mourn for their parents in the absence of any counselling or adjustment help. Robertson (1975) reported that many children are separated during infancy and early childhood, with the mean length of separation being about five years. Beyond anecdotal accounts however, the nature and quality of relationships of children and relatives during periods of separation is largely unknown.

Upon reunification, children experience a range of difficulties in adjusting to the demands of a new environment. Cheetham (1972) reported that many parents were acutely disappointed with the outcome of reunions as children were frequently confused, resentful or withdrawn, rather than being grateful for, and delighted by the reunion as parents may have expected. This expectation of a happy reunion is often in disregard of any possible rejection stemming from acute anxiety, excessive need for love, powerful feelings of revenge, and possibly guilt and depression. A child may also arrive to find brothers and sisters born in the UK established as members of a family in which he/she feels an outsider, or may arrive with only the faintest memory of the parents, who may have left the child as an infant and whom he/she now has to live with as a virtual stranger (Field and Hakim 1971).

The difficulties of transition do not therefore end when parents and children reunite; the parents having missed the child's formative years, must however take over parental roles which very often results in conflicts around family relationships, communication and discipline of children especially when they clash with the new culture (Sewell-Coker, Hamilton-Collin, and Fein 1985).

Robertson (1975) found that if the maternal bond was strong before separation, maternal interest and affection did not seem to wane appreciably, and children related to parents more easily. The older the reunited children and the more discrepant in age siblings were, the better the relationship with mothers. The younger the reunited child and the closer in age his/her siblings were, the more difficult it was for children to relate to mothers. Apparently, older offspring who are close in age require less attention and may not compete for the mothers' undivided attention.

However a distinction has to be made between West Indian children and West African children on two major grounds. Firstly while the West Indies children are usually left behind with grandparents or other relatives, the West African children were mostly placed with white families who are both racially and culturally different from the

children. Secondly a large proportion of the West African children are placed, as babies whereas West Indian children who come to join their parents in the UK are usually grown ups whose problems and needs may not be similar to those of the West African children.

Transracial issues: Save the Children (1993) drew attention to the fact that none of the earlier research and commentaries on private fostering (Holman, 1973, Ellis, 1978, and Goody 1982) had referred explicitly to the issue of race, or to issues connected with their parents' culture (SCF, 1993 p55). The reasons for this oversight on the part of past research on private fostering is seen as the result of the fact that these terms came to the fore in the 1980s, and partly also in the context of public debates about how to reconcile the particular demands of minorities for cultural pluralism with the broad goals of social integration.

The demands for cultural pluralism and social integration found resonance in social work within the context of fostering and adoption, especially in discussion on transracial versus same-race placements. This debate had by the late 1980s coalesced around those who argued that transracial placements were bounded in conflict and contradictions which undermined both a child's self-esteem and the formation of a positive racial identity (Maxime 1986, 1987, Small 1986); and those who argued that the very concept of positive racial identity required critical analysis, and that relationship between this term and a child's self esteem was tenuous (Tizard and Phoenix, 1989).

Although the background and thrust of this debate focused on family placement arrangements for children made by public agencies, it has taken on board the issue of private fostering especially as the Children Act 1989 provides that the racial, cultural, linguistic and religious needs of privately fostered children be taken into consideration when assessing or deciding on placements [Regulation 2(c)].

The issue and current debate:

The issues of transracial adoption and fostering have been the subjects of many recent debates (Transracial placement here referring to the placements of black children with white carers/parents). Opinions are largely divided between those who believe solely in same race placements of children and those who believe that exception can be made to this rule.

Proponents of same race placements argue that only families of the same race can enhance the child's feelings of positive racial identity, equip the child to cope in a racist society, reflect a cultural heritage that enhances feelings of belonging and reduces isolation by providing an environment where feelings are shared and experiences similar (Chimezie 1975, King 1993, Small 1986, Ladner 1977, and Maxime 1993). Thus black children should be placed in black families, and dual heritage children in either compatible dual heritage families, or black families. The argument being that white families cannot provide the support those black and dual heritage children need in a society where the colour of one's skin has such over-riding implications and racism is endemic.

Proponents of same race placements are agreed that it is important that the black child is placed in an environment that can provide both support and coping strategies in a society where racism is deep-rooted, and prejudices demonstrated (Small, 1986). Boateng (1989) insists that this support is fundamental to the development of the child's feelings of worth and positive identity. Emphasising that 'care and love are not the only components of good parenting for the black child...pride in what you are and having a positive racial identity are also essential' (Boateng, 1989). However those that are against a policy of same-race placement argue that there is little evidence to support the psychologically damaging effects of transracial adoption and fostering (Children First 1990, Tizard and Phoenix, 1989,).

Citing several research studies (Bagley and Young 1979, Costin and Wattenburg 1979; Gill and Jackson 1983; and Simon and Alstein 1977; 1981). Tizard and Phoenix observed that although these studies have shown that the majority of transracially adopted or fostered children do indeed have little contact with their own racial group; comparable studies of children from the same background living with their families of origin have not been done especially with adolescents; and therefore to that extent makes the whole argument by their opponents suspect and inconclusive.

In summary, those against same race placements argue that the notion that there is 'a black culture' or 'a black racial identity' which must be transmitted to transracially placed children is unconvincing (as in Britain) given the plethora of contemporary black life styles. Furthermore the belief that there is a 'positive black identity', which must be acquired by black children, is oversimplified and prescriptive and fails to take into account the way in which black parents and children describe themselves.

There are, of course, considerable philosophical ideological and ethical concerns or issues to both sides of the arguments, which are beyond the scope of this study. However, whatever the ideological and philosophical arguments, the issue of transracial placements has been an area of intense debate and media commentaries in social work.

Private fostering: the legal Development.

Private fostering in Britain dates back to the 19th Century when babies and young children were 'farmed out' usually for wet nursing or because they were illegitimate (R.E.U. 1993). A review of the legal development of private fostering arrangements suggests unease about how to develop a coherent framework of social order that defines the conditions of responsibility between the state, birth parents, and foster carers. The apparent unease about how to construct a coherent public role in this sphere is reflected in the way the State has acted only within the confines of special

circumstances that have been thrown up over the last century by these private childcare arrangements

The State has consistently limited its role to one of regulating the interdependence between the parties in such a manner as to increase trust and reduce deceit. Child care in general as noted earlier, and private fostering in particular manifests a complex struggle in the aims of the State agencies to create a social order which strikes a balance between protecting children and respecting adult freedom; and which the state had acted only in special circumstances. It was against the background of special circumstances involving children in private foster care that the Infant Life protection Act 1872 emerged. Following the conviction of another foster carer for the murder of a private foster child in 1896, the 1897 Infant Life Protection was enacted and strengthened the role of the state and reduced adult freedom to make private fostering arrangements. The act also for the first time, defined the meaning of 'improper care' and linked this to the power under which officials could remove children from private foster home.

Another set of special circumstances led to a review of private fostering arrangements in the 1950s. This review was prompted by the Home Office during the debate on the Boarding-out of Children Regulations 1955 which considered children in independent residential schools to fall within the framework of private fostering legislation as spelled out in the Public Health Act 1936 and the Children Act 1948.

The Children Act 1958 therefore resulted from the conflict and balance over the scope of social and legal regulation of private fostering arrangements. The 1958 Act defined the circumstances in which a child could be classified as being privately fostered, the responsibilities of private foster carers, and the residual powers of a Local Authority towards privately fostered children.

The scenario leading to the formulation of the 1958 Act, according to Joshua (1992, pp.5), "was an indication of a major dilemma that private fostering posed for the State".

This dilemma anchored on; - what forms of private arrangements for the upbringing of children are normal for families to make? And, in what circumstances should the devices used by parents for their children's upbringing be bridled by State regulation? The 1958 Act defined and residualised these circumstances in a form that least interfered with parents' rights to make private child care arrangements.

WEST AFRICANS IN THE ARENA:

By the 1960s, there emerged another set of problems; this involved the placement of a large number of black children in white foster homes by student families from West Africa. Even though the problem was noted by the Home Office in 1967, it took the view that little could be done because of limited residual powers of Local Authorities to impose requirements on either the number of children a carer could foster or the standard of care and accommodation that could be provided (Home Office, 1967. p.16). Packman (1968) devoted some attention to private fostering in her comprehensive study of children in public care and lamented the absence of research into the practice of private fostering. She also noted that in the absence of clear guidance, the children's departments saw their powers towards private fostering as a fringe responsibility

The Association of Child Care Officers had argued for a requirement that parents, in addition to foster carers, also be required to notify the placement of a particular child to the Local Authority (Association of Child Care Officers – undated p1). The ineffectiveness of individual notification was responsible for this argument, and the Association also suggested that a system of registration similar to that used for childminding be introduced. This suggestion was rejected on grounds that registration would drive the practice underground and thus perpetuate bad practice. Bevan (1973) however argued that such rejection should be seen in terms of the State's reluctance to normalise arrangements, which the 1958 Act had explicitly sought to bridle. He argued

that the reluctance to settle the legal relationship between the child and the foster parent has meant that private fostering had remained the "Cinderella of English family law".

Concern arising from highly publicised court cases involving private foster carers contesting the custody of West African children fostered with them, was also responsible for the reversal of earlier stand which rejected the suggestions that parents also notified the Authority of their intention to foster their child.

A series of 'Tug -of –love' cases involving birth parents and foster carers had brought into focus issues of race, nationality, culture, and above all, the welfare and interests of the children. O'Connor Vs A & B [1971] 1W.L.R.1227[1971] 2 ALL E.R 1230, is a case concerning a privately fostered child who had spent five years with a foster carer with little contact with the birth parents, but the parents wanted to remove the child for a return to West Africa. The judge decided that it was not in the interest of the child to be removed from a secure family environment to an unfamiliar culture to which the child had not been prepared. Case RE O (minors) (wardship: jurisdiction) CA [1982] concerned the granting of wardship to a private foster carer who had looked after a child for three and a half years and wanted to retain the child when parents wanted the child back. Again the court's decision was based on the welfare principle and the paramount of the child's best interests.

These cases and many more brought to the fore the problems of race, nationality, and the welfare and interests of the child in so far as the basis for courts' decisions were defended as being taken to safeguard the child's best interests. Considerable importance was also attached to social and psychological parenthood and the possibility of long term trauma if the children were removed from their carers and taken back to West Africa into unfamiliar cultures for which their upbringing had not prepared them.

These judicial decisions forced into the limelight the mood of the time and emerging outcomes of reviews of the failings of the childcare services.

The outcomes reflected also the emerging thinking then that in any matter concerning the upbringing of a child or his property, the child's welfare should be the court's paramount consideration.

As a result of feelings generated by the custody battles over West African Children, the 1975 Children Act had provisions in which the Secretary of State could invoke statutory instruments to control the conditions under which advertisements for private fostering could be made. This also included controlling the activities of parents through notification of their intentions to foster their children privately, and the occasions and frequency of visits by officers of the Local Authorities. However, these controls like the ones before them were not enabled by regulations.

While the Act laid down the duties of Local Authorities, (section 3), these duties were general and open to interpretations. Because the Act required foster parents (not birth parents or legal parents), to notify the Authority of their intention to foster a child, it was assumed that parents had the right to make private arrangements without consulting anyone about their actions. Another element of confusion introduced was the provision that foster parents could disregard the requirement to notify the Local Authority in advance if the child was placed or received 'in an emergency'. This did weaken the provisions of the legislation because there was no definition of what constituted an emergency. Thus the Local Authorities could not make objective assessments of the suitability of carers and their premises when children were already placed or were unable to contact the parents when placements were assessed to be unsatisfactory. This lack of statutory obligation to visit within specific periods relegated private fostering to the 'as and when' category when establishing priorities (Atkinson and Horner, 1990).

Within this framework, private fostering was re-constructed as having entered into the 'twilight zone' (Francis 1986 p95 18-19) of child care policy (a zone in which the private conduct of parents had broken into new public domains), and by so doing

had turned private fostering into a grey area which agencies of the State within the definitions and powers of the legislation that existed, were unable to contain.

Issues arising from the history of private fostering in England and Wales were typified by how and by what means to deliver effective and sensitive services to supervise the welfare of privately fostered children within the wider grey area into which this practice had been turned. The matter was how to reach a balance between the private responsibilities of parents and the public duties to safeguard the welfare of children in private foster care; or how to promote the best interests of children throughout their childhood, and pay due regard to their wishes and feelings, and to respect and promote issues of race, language and religion.

Children's rights. In this crowded and confused picture, has been the key development and acceptance that children have rights and needs of their own, separate from those of their parents and families. The development of foster care has also been influenced by this development. This is noted in the sense that foster care has come to be seen as the expression of the child's need for, and right to, a personalised family care that the workhouses and other institutions could not provide.

Alongside the focus on abuse has also developed since the 1970s, a focus on a more rights-based approach. The crucial sets of rights have been children's rights and parents' rights. In the field of children's rights in particular, there was renewed optimism following the United Nations International year of the Child in 1979. The perspective gathered strength in policy and practice in the 1980s and 1990s where particular aspects of policy which reflect a children's rights view, can be identified in England and Wales. However, while central and local governments' systems for delivering the various health, education and welfare services in England and Wales have changed over the last decade, the legislative framework within which these services operate have not altered in ways that are consistent with reforms in family law.

While some changes have strengthened the ability of health and welfare professionals as well as parents to act in the best interests of the child, others have failed to do so, and leave little time or space for either the voices of children themselves or of their parents, to be heard and considered.

A major manifestation of the children's rights perspective in practice has been the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Passed in 1989, the convention's status is an international legal instrument, which is more binding than a Declaration, although not enforceable in the courts in the way that the European Convention on Human Rights is (Newell, 1991). The convention is a wide-ranging treaty addressing general principles such as non-discrimination, best interests of the child, the right to life, survival and development as well as respect for the views of children.

Articles also encompass civil rights and freedom, family environment and alternative care, basic health and welfare, education, leisure, and cultural activities, measures of protection concerning children in situation of emergency, children in situation of exploitation and belonging to minority groups. The convention places a duty on governments to ensure its implementation, to make its principles known both to adults and children. Until its adoption in 1989, no binding international instrument existed bringing together states' obligation to children. Now ratified by 191 countries, the Convention is made up of 54 Articles, 41 of which are concerned with the actual rights of children.

In England and Wales the children's rights perspective has been one of a number of perspectives (as exemplified by the work of Harding, 1991), and which professionals and social scientists have debated and/or applied in child care cases by a greater concern for the child's own feelings and views; increasingly so in the late 1980s and 1990s. As far back as the mid 1970s, the 1975 Children Act contained two sections, which related to the child's own wishes and feelings.

Section 3 stipulates that in adoption decisions, the court or agency should 'as far as practicable ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child, having regard to his/her age and understanding. Section 59 embodied a similar provision for decisions relating to children in local authority care (This provision was re-enacted in the 1980 Child Care Act as section 18[1]) (Harding, 1991).

The 1989 Children Act strengthened the provision regarding welfare in that the child's welfare now becomes the paramount consideration in court cases relating to a child's upbringing. Section 1(3) sets out a welfare checklist to guide the court's decisions, in which the child's wishes and feelings are placed at the top. The wishes of the child were to be ascertained and duly considered in court and local authority decisions about children in proceedings or children being looked after. A number of other provisions in the Children Act 1989 are relevant to the notion of children's rights. Significantly, the fact that the child's racial origins, religion, culture and linguistic background were important factors which the local authority must take into account in decision taking (section 22), can be seen as an important element in support of children's rights, to the extent that these factors uphold the child's own identity.

However, compared with many other countries in Europe, the United Kingdom as a whole was adjudged to have done less (by the UN Committee on the implementation of the convention in 1995), to give a consistently higher priority to the best interests of children throughout the political agenda. But while parliament may not have passed legislation, which specifically incorporates the provisions of the convention, recent developments especially as have been discussed above, do reflect a concern with the child as an individual with an individual set of interests, and with a right to have these interests represented and heard separately.

The notion of children as appropriately having a degree of autonomy and rights to control their lives seemed to be the area of most rapid movement at the end of the 20th century.

Private fostering and the Children Act 1989:

While the debate on private fostering in the 1970s focused on custody battles when parents wanted to take children who had been privately fostered back to West Africa (Bevan, 1973 and Murray, 1975), discussions on private fostering in the 1980s focused on children privately fostered but whose parents were resident abroad.

The public domain into which the issue had been introduced, and the initial categorisation of the same issue as a grey area, was reflected in the debate on the Children Bill in Parliament. Baroness Faithful at the third reading of the 1989 Bill said,

> '...a number of us have had correspondence with Lincolnshire County Council...who tells us that people from overseas have placed their children in private foster homes and have left them. Sometimes they do not visit the children and occasionally they do not come back for them at all. This is a serious matter...and the chairman of the Social Services Department...is deeply disturbed that...regulations are not in force' (Hansard, 6 June 1989).

Joan Lestor, MP saw the problem in terms of 'balance' and 'neglect' when she said: -

> ...'This long-standing problem goes back over many years. It came to public attention in the 1970s...it is difficult to strike a proper balance between the rights of parents and the rights of children, but I have never understood why for so long the issue has been neglected and left out of any serious consideration...'
> (Hansard, 6 June 1989).

David Mellor MP, in response to the range of opinions voiced about private fostering during the parliamentary debate, stated that:

> '...clearly a problem exists...we are clearly anxious to maintain a proper balance between controlling and checking a child's well-being and keeping to a minimum the amount of interference by the State that is consistent with carrying out these duties...there are some areas where in light of the debate there may be room for reconsideration, because the subject rightly excites strong opinions...I shall ensure that we take carefully into account all the points that have been made in today's debate, as well as others, when deciding what regulations to include...They would allow full specification of the points that have been our chief anxiety today...'
> (Hansard, 6 June 1989).

The Government outlined its approach by the third reading of the Children Bill to the order, integration, relevance and balance that would in future, inform and guide the

private responsibilities of parents and the public duties of Local Authorities towards children in private fostering arrangements.

This was stated as:

> '...Local Authorities' powers are extended by giving them the power to prohibit any private fostering placement where the foster parents or the accommodation is unsuitable or where the placement is prejudicial to a child's welfare...previously that power applied only where the Local Authority had not been properly notified of the placement. On reflection, that appeared to be too restrictive...There are particular anxieties about the welfare of West African children placed by their parents with white foster parents with insufficient regard to the children's race and culture. We expect Authorities as part of their pre-placement inquiries and duty to give advice to foster parents on the children's needs arising from their racial origin and cultural background'. (Hansard 26 October 1989).

Finally, the foregoing indicates that, although the discourse on private fostering dates back to the latter part of the nineteenth century, it was not until the 1970s and 1980s that West African children became the predominant group. 'When they did emerge, however, they became a highly visible group and a source of concern' (AFAS, 1993).

As for legislation, the problem, as defined in Parliament primarily depicted previous legislation as lacking in order, integration, relevance and balance, as defined by the various cited opinions voiced during the debate. While the parliamentary debate in 1989 represented one of the most sustained explorations into a subject previously defined as 'The Cinderella of English family law'; the character of the debates brought another dimension into the debate. These were concerns about the welfare of the children and concerns about the legitimacy of the children's presence in Britain.

At the end of the day, and in spite of these differences, private fostering emerged with a conceptual framework together with regulations and guidance that has subsequently been published in Volume 8 of the Children Act 1989. This is seen as an attempt at constructing a new framework in so far that it states:

> 'Local Authorities will need to review their existing policies and practices in the light of regulations and guidance and give the same priority to these responsibilities as to other statutory duties' (Children Act 1989: Regulations and Guidance Vol. 8 preface).

It is clear from the review of the literature on private fostering that a lot of the opinions and commentaries about this form of childcare are based on beliefs and anecdotal evidence but not on research. What is clear from the foregoing discussion is that the patterns and motives for private fostering are different from those of public care.

However public law and policies in childcare is based on the assumption that these are similar, and the continued comparison between the two in terms of practice is therefore a fallacy. Common to all forms of childcare placements is the issue of attachments and separation. However, the potential of private foster care to break children's bond with their culture and religion is a major issue, particularly for West African children in private foster care. As a means of situating this study within the array of literature that exist about private fostering, a table of important researches and commentaries about this field of childcare, is presented on the next page.

Table 1.2 Some selected researches and commentaries on private fostering in England.

S/N	Author	Title of Work	Sample Size	Area Covered	People interviewed
1	Holman R. (1973)	Trading in Children: a study in private fostering.	100 carers. 143 children.	Birmingham	Foster carers and Social workers.
2	Ellis J. (1971	-Fostering of West African children.	All these were not empirical studies but social commentaries and discussion about the problems associated with private fostering; its causes, public perceptions and the attendant problems associated with the practice.		
-	(1975).	-West African families in Britain.			
-	(1979).	-Foster Kids in the Cultural Gaps.			
3	Goody E & Muir C G. (1982).	Parenthood and social reproduction: West African Couples in London.	296 Couples	London	Couples with children.
4.	Biggs V. (1978).	'Private Fostering'	Review of the field of private fostering without any empirical data; others' works cited.		
5.	Joshua L. (1988)	Review of the African Family Advisory Services.	A review of the work of the African Family Advisory Services on private fostering.		
	-(1991)	Private fostering a migrant worker's dilemma.	A discussion of the childcare problems faced by West African parents in the UK.		
6.	Mama A. (1984)	Black Women, the Economic Crisis and the British State.	Being a review of the place of Black women within the British economy in crisis and childcare problems they experience.		
7.	Race Equality Unit (REU) (1993).	Black Children and private fostering.	Report of the Working Group on Private fostering of West African Children.		
8	Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) (1994).	'Signpost': Findings from a National Inspection of private Fostering.	14 placements. 6 West African children.	3 Local Authorities.	Carers and Social workers.
9	Save The Children (1997).	Private Fostering: The development of policy & practice in 3 English Local Authorities.	42 children 8 carers 42 social workers 52 health Visitors.	3 Local Authorities.	Social workers and Health Visitors and Carers.
10	Stapleton P. (1969).	Children of Commonwealth Students: the parents' dilemma.	A review of the dilemmas faced regarding childcare by Commonwealth student parents in the United Kingdom.		

CHAPTER TWO.

The Family, Socialisation and childrearing in West Africa.

A family at its simplest level includes a husband and a wife and their offspring. This is what has today become known and referred to as a "nuclear family". However, recent changes in lifestyles and habits have made it misleading to restrict the definition of a family in modern times as a husband and wife instead of a man and woman living together. Many couples live together and do indeed create a family in many societies without traditional sanctions of the union. But the nuclear family has often been used as the basis of analysis of many a scientist who have written and researched into the family in Western industrial societies. While the nuclear family may be the dominant form of family system in modern societies, there are other types of family structures that have evolved and survived in many other societies. In whichever society however, the family plays important and vital roles not only for its members, but also in the relationships that members have to each other.

Since society must indoctrinate the young who form its new recruits into how things are done or not done, these responsibilities have often fallen naturally to "the family". Within the family the individual first encounters the norms of society. This first point of contact by implication also means that the family becomes unwittingly vested with the responsibility to transmit these norms and values to the child. However, the family may not represent the same direct experience to everyone because there are many children and even adults who have not, or are not experiencing life in the context of what have here been described as the family. Whatever one's childhood history, it is impossible to write about the family without arousing in one memory of personal experiences and problems. Whether as a researcher or a mere commentator, one cannot deal with the subject without being in some way involved.

This personal involvement presents both an opportunity (for the greater interest aroused) and a threat (because family problems are strongly emotive for each individual). Therefore opinions about the family, marriage, and the rearing of children are influenced by one's political and philosophical beliefs arising from one's environment and socialisation.

In this section attempt is made to discuss the structure and function of the African family in general and West Africa in particular, socialisation, and the whole gamut of child rearing. The aim is to introduce the reader to the many and varied child rearing practices in Africa in general and West Africa in particular. This is done out of the conviction that a research on private fostering which West Africans in the United Kingdom have become identified with, can only acquire a meaning when the cultural antecedents of the practice is understood. Many researchers and commentators (e.g. Holman, 1973, 1975. Stapleton, 1969. Ellis, 1976. Save the Children (1988/89, 1990, and 1993), have argued that many West Africans turn to private fostering as an extension of the cultural practices in their home societies. Such expositions have however failed to explain the reasons for the practice of fostering in African societies. I think that a point of departure will naturally be an understanding of the nature, function and roles of the family in Africa. The section is intended to describe the African family generally and West Africa in particular, no claim is made to total anthropological expositions on the African family. Current sociological works dealing comprehensively with the African family are scarce, especially for the whole of black Africa.

This work therefore does not attempt to describe the "ideal-type" family. There are many variations in African family life. Yet more detailed country studies need to be done in order to fully record and describe current variations. Only when such studies are completed could anyone attempt a general synthesis, an ideal type or a theory of the African family. The aim here is merely to summarise what is known about African

families, socialisation, and the childrearing practices associated with the societies that are described.

THE FAMILY IN AFRICA:

The Family in Africa, like in most human societies, is one of the strongest and most important traditions. This strong family tradition has survived many system changes that these societies have experienced over the years. These changes and experiences include such devastating human experiences like the slave trade, colonialism, poverty, famine, and modernisation; as well as the growth of towns and cities in Africa. These forces have however ultimately weakened the family fabric, which had for generations proved very resilient. A common theme in the writings of various authors on the institution of the family in Africa is the diversity of behavioural patterns among the various ethnic nationalities even within one country. All of these societies have been affected by economic, social and legal changes that have been instituted by colonial and post- colonial administrations. These changes are bound to affect families in different ways, depending on the structures and norms that existed prior to the advent of colonial penetration and the introduction of cash economy.

An understanding of the present situation of African families and the problems they face has to begin with an understanding of the structure of the typical African family, and its dynamics.

Like those in other parts of the world, African families embody two contrasting bases for membership: Consanguinity and Affinity. The former referring to kinship that is commonly based and rooted in "blood ties", and the latter referring to kinship created by law and rooted in "in-law"(Marshall, 1968). Traditionally organised around consanquineal cores formed by adult siblings, a close-knit family or kinship was at the core of all social organisation of the African family. Weaving, blacksmithing, woodcarving and other traditional crafts were usually hereditary within a lineage (who

can trace their descent to a known ancestor). Each lineage was usually composed of a number of extended families. This group, which formed around these, related core members would usually include their spouses and children, and perhaps some of their divorced siblings of the opposite sex.

Upon marriage young couples did not usually form new isolated households, but joined a compound, which the extended family of the groom, or that of the bride, was already domiciled. It is quite common in many African languages to refer to "in-marrying" spouses collectively as " wives" or "husbands." The children in the extended family compound regarded themselves as brothers and sisters (rather than dividing into siblings and cousins) and adults assume certain responsibilities towards their "nephews" and "nieces" (whom they term sons and daughters) as well as toward their own offspring. This means that African conjugal units within the extended families did not have the rigid boundaries characteristic of nuclear families of the West.

Decision-making centred in the consanquineal core group. The eldest male in the compound was usually its head, and all the men in his generation constituted the elders of the group. Together they were Collectively responsible for settling internal disputes or, in some cases by the female elders among the wives. (Sudarkasa, 1973). The relationship of children to adults and adults to children were well defined and was transmitted from generation to generation.

In general, there was reverence for age in African societies that was more marked and institutionalised than in European societies. (E.g., government decision-making was often in the hands of older men; and deference was given to age even in the expression of an opinion). While children were to show respect to adults, adults were in turn expected to be supportive of and helpful to children. Thus, a child in need could call upon any adult within his lineage and tribe and expects concerned attention. Parents welcomed the help of others in setting limits for their children and even for punishing them for misbehaviours.

Kinship arrangements were formally established for counselling, care and disposition of wives, children, and property during the life of a man and after his death. For example, in the Afikpo area of southeastern Nigeria, the eldest brother in a family of the Ibo tribe was the counsellor and advisor to the son of his sister, even while their father was still alive (Comer, 1980). Among the Yoruba, a group significantly represented among present day West Africans in the United Kingdom, each lineage had its own farmland. The land belonged to all members of the lineage; no man had to work for hire. All helped to provide or secure basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. Where it was possible, the elders at the village and town levels settled disputes. In cases of irreconcilable disputes between lineages, the King's decision was final. Thus one could say that government was not only by the people, for the people, and of the people, but government by the kinspeople, for the kinspeople, and of the kinspeople.

One distinct feature of the African family system is the importance of children to the total kin group. Children were so important that traditionally husbands were allowed or encouraged to marry a number of wives to guard against being childless. Every married couple wants children; they are regarded as better than riches, as gifts from God. Among the Akwapim tribe in Ghana, Kaye (1962) observed that children were greatly valued, "since they help in the house and on the farm, they serve visitors, they support their parents in old age and are their heirs" Kaye (1962. p.22.) Also among the Asante of Ghana, childbearing is seen as the most important aspect of marriage, if not the sole aim, since without children a lineage comes to an end. Children perpetuate the clan; are a source of social prestige and parents who had large number of children in some societies, were greatly respected and addressed by special titles. Not only did children provide care and comfort to their parents in old age; large number of children meant more hands on the farm for the family. Children were such important products of marriage that no one would think of them as a liability. A woman may achieve prestige

and recognition in traditional West African society by giving births to ten children without necessarily raising all of them herself.

The economic cost of children to parents may be lowered by the practice of fostering, while their potential value in terms of old age insurance and other benefits may remain high, leading to a positive intergenerational wealth flow from children to parents. The extended family system, on which child fostering is buttressed, acts to even out the hardships of a large family size. This delegation of parental roles entails the sharing of childrearing responsibilities, and the removal of the burdens and constraints of high childbearing. This scenario would look different from that which is known and practised in western societies, where the childbearer is assumed to be the person responsible for bringing the child to full adult status. Academic and policy discussions on fertility (in terms of costs and benefits) have often been dominated by the simplest of decision-making models. The assumption being, fertility decisions are made by bearers and begetters, who have direct rights and responsibilities associated with socialising as well as producing the next generation. Such a model would be quite inappropriate in the traditional African context as has briefly been shown above

Indeed, one of the most striking features of West Africa in terms of the family system and childrearing is a seemingly paradoxical combination. There is on the one hand, the tremendous importance attached to parenthood; on the other hand there is a very high incidence of children being reared by persons other than their biological parents. This seeming paradox is, however easy to explain as we look at the issue of socialisation and childrearing generally in the African context.

SOCIALISATION AND CHILDREARING.

In all human societies, matured adults protect, nurture, and educate the young; but among humans the patterns of childrearing are not uniform. Experts (Whitting ET

al, 1966 have showed the environments of infancy and early childhood. Caudil and Weinstein, 1969) to be increasingly shaped by cultural values. These values vary widely among ethnic groups and become firmly established in the personal preferences and inner regulations of individuals who seek to re-establish them in the next generation. Parents of different cultural backgrounds define the universal situation of child rearing differently and attempt to organise the lives of their children accordingly from birth onward.

For instance, in areas where the incidence of disease causes high infant mortality (as is the case in most countries of sub- Saharan Africa), customary patterns of infant care will not only be organised by health and survival goals, but will also embody avoidance of specific local hazards as dictated by the folk beliefs system. In areas of precarious subsistence, the cultural formula for parents will be designed around the priority of enabling the child to make a living in adulthood, particularly after his/her physical survival is assured.

In most agricultural populations of tropical Africa in the past, and presently, infant mortality has long been high and subsistence precarious. In many rural areas these hard facts have not significantly changed; the child's physical survival and economic future remain in jeopardy and seem to be the salient goals for parental behaviour. At the same time African parents expect their progeny to contribute to the family labour force during childhood and to become adults who would support their elderly parents. Different investment strategies in child rearing have been adopted to meet these goals. Some parents may sometimes maximise fertility as their best strategy. Maximising fertility increases the probability of having some children who survive infancy to become hand helps on the family land and providers of support to parents in their old age. If many survive more hands and help can always be used in the extended kin network if not in the immediate family. These adaptive solutions are a form of parental investments; (here referring to the allocation parents make of their valued

resources, including time and attention in rearing their children) therefore these parental investment strategies represent culturally acceptable pathways towards the goals of child rearing.

Another strategy employed to maximise these goals is the practice of child fostering. The delegation of parental roles by fostering out children entails the sharing of child rearing responsibilities and the removal of the burdens and constrains of prolific childbearing in most societies of Africa.

This ensures the survival of the child and thus guaranteeing his/her future in the society. The economic cost of children to parents may be lowered by this practice while the child's potential value in terms of old age insurance and other benefits may remain high. Thus child fostering, while fulfilling an aspect of cultural norms, serves as another form of investment strategy by parents to guarantee or attain the three goals of childrearing mentioned earlier.

This then calls into question the role of the state in family life in West Africa, and the provisions for childcare. In most African states, the government does not have extensive powers or provisions in the social Welfare field. Services are provided on a broad basis, (i.e., Hospitals, Schools, Houses and Universities). Support for families beyond these services do not exist in many African countries. Especially in Nigeria where the researcher has vast knowledge from working as a social worker, government policy does not to this day, have the family as a priority.

Family problems are seen and regarded as the responsibilities of the family (extended or nuclear). Intervention of the state in the family is sometimes through the probation services where officers are assigned to furnish the judicial system with information about the child's family and social background when a young person under 16 years of age commits crime. Marital counselling is around child support of separated couples. This has thus made the Welfare Departments become identified with the struggles over paternity and child support rather than with issues that help couples to

care better for their children. Both the extended family and the traditional ruling systems still play very important and influential roles in African societies in general and Nigeria in particular. For instance, where names are easily identifiable with particular families, one can understand why the issues of confidentiality can be a deterrent to a family approaching welfare agencies with a family problem or seeking assistance with child care. Problems and decisions are seen as the responsibility of each family to be resolved within that family.

Legislation and direct government intervention towards safeguarding the interest of the child over those of the parents have been seen as unacceptable and perceived as unnecessary. In effect, there is nothing by way of state provisions of social security benefits in such forms as child benefit, Family credit, redundancy benefit, as well as all other known forms of state provisions that families are entitled to in Britain, whether means tested or universally provided. These may therefore explain some of the child rearing strategies that West African parents in general and Nigerian parents in particular, adopt when bringing up their children.

Childrearing are therefore tied not only to the societal goals, but also to the role of the state in the life of the family in the particular society.

A cursory look at the child rearing practices of Western Industrial societies will obviously show that families in these societies have different investment strategies. Firstly, infant mortality rate is low, and there are no serious problems of child labour; and care of the elderly is bureaucratically organised. Secondly, the family in the west whether urban or suburban, is a domestic economic unit sharing income and consumption rather than production.

Children are seen as economic costs with no benefit to the economic welfare of the parents and family; instead benefit is conceptualised in terms of the emotional comfort or moral satisfaction a parent can derive from devoting personal resources to the raising

of a new generation and maintaining long-term relationships when he/she would otherwise be lonely (Levine, 1980).

As regard what parents want for their children, here at least the survival problem of the child is not paramount and most parents focus on the child's attainment of a position in life that is equivalent to or an improvement upon that of the parents. The maintenance or improvement of socio- economic status seems to be the most widespread parental goal in the child rearing strategies.

In most middle-class western families, the nurturing of character traits sufficient for socio-economic success and moral autonomy is assumed to be so costly of human time, efforts, and attention as to require a full-time maternal role in which mothers are replaceable only by expensive arrangements simulating the personalised care of mother herself. The parental investment strategy involves a large investment in each of a small number of children; and this include the cost of keeping women out of the labour market to serve as full-time mothers; and the cost of day-care arrangements when mothers work.

Socialisation and childrearing practices of West African Families:

Socialisation of the young in West African societies involved the entire extended family, not just the separate conjugal families, even though each family unit had special responsibility for the children (theirs or their relatives) living with them. Children of the same compound were socialised by all adults to identify themselves collectively as sons and daughters of a particular lineage and compound; which entailed a kingship based on descent, with all the lineage ancestors and with generations unborn (Uchendu 1965).

There is particularly strong bond between children and their parents: in addition to the affective links and/or strong sense of obligation toward parents that are common in many cultures of the world; there is also the respect due to parents in their capacity as

the link with the ancestors. On the other hand however, this tremendous importance attach to parenthood is contrasted against the very high incidence of children being reared by other persons other than their biological parents; persons who may assume not only the responsibilities of childrearing but also the rights associated with it. This seeming paradox can only become meaningful to the casual observer when the structures and overall set-up of the system is explained. Children are regarded as not belonging exclusively to their biological parents; and may not necessary be brought up by them. There is relatively greater importance of the "whole family" in the life of the child, the notion that children belong to everyone; the way in which a child 'has many fathers and mothers' and so is related to his society at a number of points.

A prime case of this in West Africa is the practice of 'Child-fostering', in which children are sent to be raised by non natal caretakers: relatives, friends, neighbours, or patrons (Goody, 1982; Abanihe, 1985, Blodsoe & Abanihe, 1989).

In Western societies children are generally raised by their own parents in a nuclear family. Only in exceptional circumstances do fostering take place. On the other hand, in West African societies where child fostering is normal and widespread, to distinguish the practising from the biological mother of a child one would often have to ask both the questions "Who bore you?" and "Who reared you?"(Goody, 1973,p.182). In this case the maternal home is but one of the possible homes for the child. A network of kin, with the claims and obligations they exchange, may be more crucial to a child's present and future experience and achievement than the child's parents.

THE PRACTICE OF CHILD FOSTERING:

Although the practice of sending children away is reported in many parts of the world (Ainsworth, 1967, in Uganda, Kay, 1963, and Kessing, 1970, in Oceania; Rawson and Berggren, 1973, in Haiti; Sanford, 1975, in the West Indies), perhaps nowhere is it as institutionalised as in parts of West Africa. Fostering has been a valued traditional

practice among many ethnic groups in West Africa; the practice may have become more prevalent and has certainly assumed new dimensions as societies have become more complex and diversified. Unique to West African fostering is both its prevalence and the young age at which children are placed or boarded out. It is a practice rooted in kinship structures and tradition; and children do not have to be fostered out only in times of family crises or when one or both natural parents cannot for some reasons, manage to bring them up. Rather the sending out of children is practised by both stable and unstable families, married and single mothers, healthy and handicapped parents, rural and urban homes, and wealthy and poor families. Indeed there are various types of fostering arrangements.

KINSHIP FOSTERING:

Kinship fostering is the predominant form of child fostering among many groups in West Africa. By kinship fostering, it means the sending of children to live with relatives of parents or exchanged among kinsmen who share obligations and assistance. Male children are sometimes sent to the mother's brother's homes to be raised, while the father's sister might claim female children in infancy or early childhood (Goody, 1973). Goody also reported that in matrilineal societies of Ghana, children were on occasion, raised by maternal kin with claims and responsibilities over the children.

Perhaps the most important recipient of children in the West African system is the grandparent especially at weaning. In rural areas of West Africa, sending the children away at this time facilitates the weaning process and frees the mother who sometimes has to work on the farm or go to the market regularly. Children are sent to live with the grandparents whose experience in child rearing is thought to be beneficial for the child. Fostering starts early, sometimes even before children reach their first birthday. One of the major reasons for this is when the parents want to resume sexual relations.

Traditionally, having sexual relations when the child is still breastfeeding is believed to harm the child. If a couple therefore wants to resume sexual relations the child is boarded out with a grandmother, lest the mother is tempted to breastfeed him.

This arrangement has an in-built support system to it; especially when the children's parents who may be living in the township visit and bring along gifts and presents to the grandparents. These gifts of money and clothing by parents to the grandparents may form an important part of their resource accumulation. However, this is not to say that wealth flow from the children's parents to the grand parents does not take place, but that the presence of the children guarantees the regularity of the visits and of the presents. Because a child is with a grandparent, an aunt, or a distant cousin does not mean that the family has broken up. A woman who is on her own will be sent a grandchild to keep her company; a woman who is childless will ask for a child from a more fortunate sister or brother; and a city dweller will accept a brother's child so that he may benefit from better opportunities found there. This type of fostering is seen largely as a consequence of the need to reallocate resources within the extended family or the kin group thereby ensuring the maximum survival of, and strengthening of kinship ties. Fostering is much like a welfare mechanism (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1985). Okore (1977) puts it thus: "within the family such mutual obligations are effective in minimising the burdens of raising children independent of ones own fertility".

CRISIS FOSTERING:

Fostering resulting from the dissolution of the family of origin by divorce, separation, or death of a spouse is termed as crisis fostering. In traditional societies where there is stigma attached to having children out of wedlock, and where this happens, the child is usually fostered out to a distant relation to be brought up. In most re-marriages following the break up of marital unions, the welfare of the child is regarded as better protected by the father's kin because of the fear of the child being

neglected or even poisoned by the stepmother. (Note that in most patrilineal societies of West Africa, children belong to the father's kin and so mothers do not have child custody following the dissolution of the marriage). Sometimes children are sent away because of fear or apprehension over their survival. The fear of witchcraft by a neighbour or old family enemies, a co-wife in a polygamous family, or the reprisals by an unappeased spirit of a dead clansman or ancestor could lead to fostering a child out until the crisis passes. Related to this also is when a child is sent away because of previous, possibly repeated experiences with infant or early childhood deaths. This form of fostering is thought to improve the chances of the child surviving by removing the child from the source of a crisis, real or imagined.

ALLIANCE AND APPRENTICE FOSTERING:

Goody, (1978) and Sinclair, (1972)

have identified another form of fostering that is also practised in West Africa which they refer to as Alliance and/or Apprentice fostering. This is the situation when children are fostered out to establish and strengthen social, economic, or political alliances. Children are sent as wards at a later age to nonrelatives, including friends and acquaintances of respected social standing. These usually happen when the children would have attained teenage ages and are regarded to have become reasonable enough to benefit from the experience. In the Muslim north of some West African societies (e.g. Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone), children are sent to live with influential religious or political leaders to receive adequate care, training, and instructions in the Koran. Some children are sent away to homes where they learn a trade. This combination of alliance fostering and wardship thus combines the responsibilities of training and sponsorship of young children.

Among the Ibos of eastern Nigeria, young men serve as apprentices to well established traders and businessmen at teenage ages and remain with their "Masters"

until the masters finally set them up in their own business. Another reason for sending children away to be reared by others is the need for discipline. Some parents are thought to spoil their children by not being firm with them; sending the children away is supposed to help the children develop better characters. This is indeed in view of the perception that a surrogate parent is in a better position to inculcate acceptable forms of social behaviour, and to spank a child, or inflict other forms of punishment, until the child learns to perform useful functions. The thing of note here is that the motivation for this form of fostering is social mobility, and the believe that children raised under the supervision of a surrogate parent, especially those socialised in superior or prestigious homes, are more sophisticated than those raised by their own parents.

DOMESTIC FOSTERING:

It was earlier noted how important children are as part of the domestic labour force to the family in an agrarian society such as in West Africa. Children therefore may be fostered to redistribute availability of services between households. Female children particularly are sent to experienced women to learn the domestic roles they will perform later in their future homes (Fiawoo, 1978, Goody, 1973, 1975). A little girl of between 7-10 years old will usually be sent to the home of a new mother, especially an older sister to "carry" the baby and acts like a baby-minder. Children are also sent out to provide emotional support and companionship to childless women. Childless women are usually given children to rear so that they do not become discouraged and isolated in the community. Elderly grand parents who live alone will need the services of their grand children in such areas as fetching water from the streams or collecting firewood from the bush.

This form of child fostering has taken on new dimensions in modern times in the urban centres. Nowadays, many families take in children as domestic servants, maids, and baby "nurses" in exchange for their maintenance, training and token wages. While

domestic fostering in its traditional form may still be practised in most rural areas of West Africa, the majority of children that are given out to both kin and non kin members to be trained or reared in the urban areas are for educational purposes or some forms of education related training.

EDUCATIONAL FOSTERING:

Most present-day child fostering (especially the movement of children from rural to urban areas), is associated with formal education which is now increasingly viewed as the sure means of upward social mobility. Fiawoo, (1978), Goody (1975), and Sinclair (1972), among others, have argued that schooling is the main motivation of modern West African child fostering. While none of these writers presented any evidence of higher school enrolment by fosters relative to non-fosters, the assumption seems plausible enough as Goody (1975) observed. 'In modern world, rights vested in kinship roles become less compelling than the need to help children acquire the new skills required for full participation in a continually diversifying economy (Goody, 1975). Hence children are increasingly sent out to be raised by non-relatives, such as schoolteachers, priests, godparents, traders, and strangers with the aim of giving them a good start in life through schooling.

Children are boarded out to relatives who are expected to provide formal education to the younger ones in return for having themselves received educational assistance. It is the educated and relatively affluent members of a family that are most likely to be called upon to care for the children of other relations. A critical factor in the shift from the traditional kin group to non relatives, is the balance between fostering as a reflection of rights vested in kinship roles and fostering as a means to education which almost all parents now desire for their children as a major source of upward social mobility. It is this need to give the child a better start in life through formal education

that has been advanced as one of the reasons why West African parents foster their children to strangers in England.

This passion for education by West Africans and the reasons for fostering their children while studying in England can be interpreted at two levels. Firstly, parents' desires to acquire a qualification is often so overwhelming that they have to place their children in foster care to give them enough time to concentrate on their studies. Secondly, by fostering the child with a white family, the assumption is that that would confer on the child some advantages, such as the child growing up speaking fluent English and acquiring English values which the parents think would give the child a better head start in life compared to other children growing up in West Africa (Holman (1973), Ellis (1971, 1977) and 1978), Goody (1982), Save the Children (1988/89), (1991) Joshua (1991, 1993). Stapleton (1969) puts this very clearly when he wrote: -

> ' We know a considerable amount concerning parents' motivation in seeking foster care for their children in white foster homes. The over-riding need for education is the most important single factor.... A very large number of parents see fostering as a very definite advantage to their child, particularly to enable him grow up speaking English fluently and to have advantages believed to exist in the English family background' (Stapleton, 1969. Pp. 23)

While this might be true for some parents to some extent, the assertion overlooks the obvious ignorance and misunderstanding on the part of West African parents regarding the nature and practices of child fostering in the UK as opposed to the practice in West Africa. In Britain, there is an intense intervention of the state in the life of the family as reflected in the laws relating to children and Social Services provisions and procedures. There is also a pervasive and proactive role by the Social Services in family life in the British society as opposed to what was described earlier for West Africa or Nigeria in particular. Culturally specific expectations on the part of both natural and foster parents in a transracial private foster care situation in England will ultimately results in role conflict which might have a devastating consequence to the child in placement.

West African parents' claims that they love their children and what they were doing was in the best interest of these children, have sometimes been called into question, given that parental contacts were erratic in the past.

This supposed erratic and sometimes irregular contacts between children and parents is one of the concerns raised with regard to the recent trends in private fostering where West African parents are shown (AFAS, 1989) to make private foster arrangements for their children in England while permanently residing in West Africa. As severe as this problem may look, it should be viewed from the perspective of the changes that have taken, and are still taking place in the various countries of West Africa.

Current state of things in West Africa.

There is scarcely a country in the modern world today where an improvement in the material level of living is not regarded as desirable and where industrialisation is not seen as the necessary means to achieve it. History is clearly on the side of this view, for nations that are rich and powerful possess a technologically advanced industrial base. The appeal of modernisation to emerging countries of Africa in the early 1950s saw these countries investing heavily in industries but mostly along the path of import substitution, development in infrastructures, expansions in enrolment at all levels, and higher rates of employment in the public sector. Modern industry was seen as providing employment for the surplus and under-utilised labour from the agricultural sector. Moreover modernisation by that time was regarded as the most appropriate path to development in so far as most development aids to third world countries were anchored on the theory of Modernisation.

Thus these countries' chances of development were seen as depending on their coming to resemble countries of the West in all aspects of their modern lives.

The route to attaining this greatness was expected to be through formal education, and higher qualifications were the key to occupations that would bring the greatest rewards in both wealth and prestige. Moreover, to the populace, those who were taking over the reign of power in those countries from the colonialists were the educated in western values and ideals. Education was therefore seen as a guarantee not only for an occupation, but also for entry into the governing stratum of the newly independent state.

These changes in lifestyles and the basic ways of life of the people in societies of West Africa have had significant impacts on the structure and functions of the family. Families have had to break up as husbands and the able bodied members of their societies moved to the urban centres in search of white collar jobs or some forms of wage employment. These have in turn affected how families rear their children or provide care for them. Whereas in the traditional setting the kin group had responsibilities for the socialisation of the children either by fostering children of relatives or sponsoring them, the specific crises now faced by many West African parents regarding childcare results from the decline in the support networks available to parents (which would have naturally cushioned the effects of any family crises) of young children as a consequent of the involvement of women in wage employment that takes them out of the home; and also the involvement of older siblings in full-time education.

These have had significant effects on women in Nigeria in particular especially with respect to issues around childcare. In some tribal groups for instant, a woman was much more independent and did not depend entirely on her husband's income, as is usually the practice in a patriarchal society like Nigeria.

The Yoruba woman for instant has an obligation to her own kin family by way of either training her younger brothers, sisters, cousins and nephews, or building a house in her father's house. These she must do while remaining also as the primary caregiver to her

young child. The strain of having to work and also care for their children means that the Yoruba woman has to ultimately make a choice between taking a job and leaving the children under potentially unsatisfactory supervision, or caring for them herself and foregoing earning an income that is critical to family survival or comfort. The cruel choice is thus often between inadequate childcare and inadequate income. Since there are no state welfare provisions to guard or cushion the pains of family crises, and because such families in difficulties cannot turn to the kin networks for support (especially when the family may be living physically very far from the kin group who would be living in the rural area of the country), the burden usually falls on the woman whom tradition assigns the primary responsibility for childcare. Many women have tried to overcome the problem by either sending for their own mothers for help after child birth or hire a house help usually called "Baby Nurse" or "house girls". She may also bring a younger sister or a nice that would feed the baby and any older children when she is away.

Leishman et al (1987) in their study of 553 Yoruba working mothers in Ibadan and Abeokuta in Western Nigeria, found that 35 percent of the mothers employing the services of "Baby Nurse" and 31 percent were employing the services of their mothers as care givers.

A Yoruba woman therefore faced with childcare problems while studying or working in Britain, will not hesitate to use existing informal networks to secure private childcare arrangements for her child thus relieving her the inconveniences and distractions the child's presence may cause. Such a decision may not be made out of a careful consideration of the overall implications of the child growing in an unfamiliar environment and in almost total isolation, but because the mother has to decide between looking after the child herself and foregoing the income from working which she considers, will guarantee the future of that family.

By choosing an elderly woman to look after her child, the West African mother assumes that such an elderly woman would possess the same experience and show the same love as her mother back in West Africa would have towards her grandchildren. Geddes (1988) showed from a small study in Wiltshire that these were some of the reasons West African mothers gave when questioned about why they thought that their children would be better looked after by women who would ordinarily not be allowed to foster for the Local Authority because of their age. There is also the assumption that a quiet English countryside would enable the child to acquire the English values which the mothers think can give the child greater advantages over other children growing back in West Africa.

Economic problems since the early 1980s coupled with persistent political instability have caused great insecurities of lives and properties in West Africa, and have by that, also caused great anxieties for parents about the future of their children. These changes have had profound impacts on the family system in these countries as cut backs in social spending have let to reduction in the provision of Education, Health, and Housing. Political instabilities have also led to the almost complete breakdown of law and order in countries like Nigeria, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.

We know that children are usually the victims of most political conflicts and or economic problems in many countries; most especially as have recently been demonstrated in Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and of course Nigeria during the last four years. Giving such scenario and coupled with the high premium placed on children in these societies, it is no surprise that parents who can afford to, take their children out of the crises zones and placed them in private foster families in England, Europe, and North America, while they remain to face the problems alone or themselves seek economic relieves either as political or economic refugees. By their actions, the child's physical survival is guaranteed and the family's name is also therefore guaranteed.

The result of all these have been the emergence of a pattern of private fostering of West African children. Children who arrive into the United Kingdom with their parents on short stay visitors' visa and are subsequently privately fostered to white families while the parents' return to West Africa.

It is this practice of placing West African children in private foster families to be reared by white families and the attendant problems associated with that which has excited official concerns leading to its inclusion in the provisions of the Children Act 1989, that is the subject of this study.

CHAPTER THREE.

RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

Opinions about private fostering in England and Wales are largely based on journalists' commentaries when a particular case brings the topic to public attention. Even research - based knowledge is limited. Journalistic commentaries have been largely based on the media's own understanding of the practice, rather than being grounded in the experiences of the foster carers or of the social workers supervising the carers in their task. For this reason a soundly based descriptive study was the first requirement. Because the aim of the study was primarily descriptive, the literature review was mostly used to identify relevant topics, rather than to identify testable theoretical propositions. For this reason also the approach to data collection and analysis (described in more detail below) primarily followed established qualitative methods (Glaser and Strauss, 1976. Corbin and Strauss, 1990. Gilgun et al, 1992.), with transcripts analysed using the **NUD.IST** computer programme (Gahan and Hannibal, 1998). However, the data used in the analysis also included Government policy documents, books and other research findings and written commentaries.

Integrated into this study also was research presented in the fields of general childcare, public foster placements, transracial placements/adoption, socialisation, and childrearing, all from disciplines such as Psychology, Sociology, Social Policy and Social work perspectives. This was done in order to get some initial ideas about the factors that impact on private foster carers or families looking after West African children in addition to how Social workers supervise and address the issues arising from their statutory responsibilities under the Children Act 1989.

DESIGN:

The design of this study consists of four elements: -

a). Collecting information on private fostering through a survey of local authorities, in England and Wales.

b). A Pilot study in one county area in order to test the research instrument and correct flaws, as well as to identify emerging relevant issues;

c). Interviews with private foster carers about their experience;

d). Obtaining information from social workers through closed ended structured questionnaires intended to measure their role performances in respect of West African children in private foster care with regard to the provisions of the Children Act, 1989, an understanding of their responsibilities.

The development of a sampling frame.

The difficulties of obtaining access to official information about foster carers' names and addresses meant that parameters had to be defined within which carers had to qualify to participate in the study. The following criteria were therefore used for a sample development or for defining who was to be included or excluded from the sample:

a) Private foster carers who were currently fostering;

b) The child or children must be West Africans or of West African parentage;

c) All children of mixed parentage were excluded even if one of the parents was of West African origin;

d) The placement must have been entirely by private arrangement between the natural parents or guardians, and the foster carer(s).

SURVEY OF AUTHORITIES.

Postal questionnaires consisting of 10 questions were sent to all local authorities in England and Wales (Appendix one). Since the Department of Health no longer collects statistics on the racial origins, geographical spread, and the number of children in private foster care. The questionnaires were intended to collect this information. The questionnaires also asked whether the Authorities had policies and practice guidelines relating to private fostering; for example, did they have statistics regarding notified cases in their areas? What was the profile of private fostering in the areas?

Questionnaires were sent to 135 Local Authorities, Boroughs, and Metropolitan Councils between January and April 1996. Eighty-seven were returned. While 41 Authorities said that there were cases of private fostering, only 16 indicated that these included African children. Twenty-five authorities did not answer any of the questions on the ethnic background of the children. Forty-eight Authorities did not return their questionnaires. These responses are summarised in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 below.

Table.3.1. Responses received from the initial survey of Local Authorities.

	N.	%
No of responses received.	87	64
None responses.	48	36
Total sent out.	135	100

Table.3.2 Local Authorities' responses indicating whether they had West African children in private foster care in their areas.

	No	%	
Total number of Authorities that had cases of private fostering.	41	47	Out of these, 16 had West African children in private foster care.
Authorities that did not have private fostering cases	46	53	
Total responses received.	87	100	

The questionnaires returned indicated that a substantial proportion of those African children known to be in private foster care was concentrated in the southern half of England. For example, between the periods of January to December 1996 in one semi-urban county in the south east of England, there were 121 new placements of African children in private foster care; and in 54 new households. This survey of Authorities thus helped to identify the geographical spread of the practice and helped in the development of a sampling frame for this study. An interesting finding from this survey was that African children on local authorities' records, were all Nigerians.

The pilot study was undertaken in one South West region of England. This site presented easy access from the university, and the authorities were willing to support the research.

THE PILOT STUDY.

Based upon the areas identified from the review of the literature and answers to the survey questionnaires, two sets of semi- structured interview guides were drawn up for both foster carers and social workers. These served as reminders of the types of questions and probes.

The Approach:

The unavailability of a register of private foster carers meant that access to both carers and social workers had to be negotiated through the SSD even though placements are usually the product of private arrangements between the birth parents and carers. However natural parents and foster carers are by law, required to notify SSD of their intentions to place or accept any child into any private fostering placement six-week prior to the actual placement.

A letter was written to the Director of Social Services of the chosen area Authority introducing the research and its objectives. Several meetings were held to discuss the appropriate methods of contact and access to foster carers. Finally it was agreed that the researcher wrote letters to foster carers, which would be distributed by social workers who had lead responsibilities for private fostering. These letters outlined the objectives of the study, the relationships between the research/ researcher and the Social Work Department as well as assured them of their anonymity and the confidentiality of the information they would provide. They were requested to send their acceptance to participate direct to the researcher using the self- addressed stamped envelopes, which were enclosed. The use of a link person in the Pilot Authority was very useful in obtaining and retaining the trust and confidence of the Social workers and foster carers.

Interviews with Carers.

There were 30 known private fostering placements in 17 households in the area known to the Department. These carers were sent letters requesting their consents for participation. Eleven positive responses were received and interviews arranged at the conveniences of the carers. All interviews were conducted in the carers' homes. All of the primary respondents interviewed were females. However, where husbands were present, their views were sought regarding their roles in the fostering situation. All

interviews lasted 1-1½ hours and with the permission of the carers, were tape-recorded for later transcription

The objective was to explore from a broad perspective the ways that the foster carers experienced private fostering, how they described it, and what meanings they gave to what they were doing. It was also intended to test the instruments during the pilot in order to redesign, if need be, the methods of data collection for the main study. The objective of the interviews was to find out the views and experiences of those bringing up West African children in white households as well as collecting factual data about what they did.

The interviews covered: -

a). The characteristics of private fostering;

b). The support systems carers and children had.

c). Notification by carers to the Social Services;

d). Carers' knowledge around issues relating to the cultural, racial and linguistic needs of the children.

e). The relationship between the foster carers and the Social Services, and

f). Carers' knowledge of the law relating to what they were doing and their rights under that law.

Questions were therefore designed to trigger the carers' own thoughts in order to generate sufficient detail to provide accurate reports or accounts of the carers' views and experiences (Hakim, 1987).

When the interviews were transcribed, they generated data that provided a glimpse of how carers experienced private fostering. The data thus obtained provided a window on the centrality of practice and facilitated a re-design of the instrument.

Interviews With Social Workers:

The interviews with social workers were limited to the Social Workers' statutory responsibilities under the Children Act 1989. They were asked such questions as 'Could you say whether this Local Authority has any policy on private fostering'? 'What procedures determine how the department assesses the suitability or otherwise of private foster carers in the area? Questions were also asked about the frequencies of visits made to foster carers; the nature of support they gave to carers; the definition of "children in need" and whether those in private foster care were included in that definition; and finally the frequency of placement notification by the foster carers and natural parents. The interviews were also tape-recorded.

Two social workers in the pilot area had responsibilities for supervising the private fostering placements. It became apparent during the interview with Social workers that the information sought from them could be obtained by means of questionnaires because Volume 8 of the Regulations and Guidance to the Children Act defines the roles that Social workers are expected to play. The interviews covered their, (or their Department's), compliance with their statutory responsibilities under the law.

Information from Birth parents:

It became clear from the interviews with foster carers that there were many things about the arrangements that could only be clarified by the birth parents. These issues were in such areas as purposes and objectives of placements, and information about the children's health, dietary habits, and care histories. Carers were not always able to answer questions about these issues. Though initially not one of the objectives of the research, obtaining information from the birth parents about themselves and their

children became an important objective. However, the lack of communication between the Social Services and the parents posed a problem to achieving this objective. It was therefore decided that since some of the parents kept in touch with the foster carers through visits and payments for the care arrangements, contacts with them could be made through the foster carers.

Letters were sent to the birth parents via the foster carers. The parents were told of the objectives of the study, who the research sponsors were, and why their contributions would help enhance people's understanding of their situation. Eleven letters were given to the foster carers and parents were asked to reply directly to the researcher using the self-addressed envelops provided. There was no response from any parent. Follow- ups were made to foster carers who all confirmed that they did send the letters to the last known addresses of the parents. The same attempt was made in the main study to contact birth parents but none responded. In three cases for instance in the main study, in one authority, parents actually removed their children from the households on the grounds that foster carers should not have spoken to the researcher or taken part in the study.

Although there was the urge to make another attempt through the Nigeria High Commission, official bottlenecks and issues of confidentiality and time constraints prevented further inroad in this respect.

Lessons From the Pilot Study:

The pilot study suggested that little had changed in the practice of private fostering since Holman's (1973) pioneering study, and the enactment of the Children Act. 1989. The following issues emerged from the pilot study: -

Characteristics of Foster Carers:

Foster carers were women in the 30-55-age range, living in council houses, and not working outside the home. They had left school at 14 or 16 and had had children of their own; many of whom had moved on to establish their own homes. These families lived in rural areas of the country, and had incomes below the national average.

The Children: The majority of the children were placed before their first birthday and remained in placements for an average of between three to four years. There were more girls than there were boys. The children were generally placed into the foster families without adequate preparations or introduction. Full information was not given to foster carers either about the children or their parents.

Children were either placed through informal channels of contact (for example, those already fostering gave the names of their friends or relatives to birth parents who seeked places for their children), or by birth parents who obtained information about foster carers from other parents. Some foster carers started by responding to advertisements placed in the magazine 'The Nursery World'.

Notification and Assessment of Carers: Most children were usually in placements before the Social Services Department was notified (78% of the placements in the pilot). No assessments were undertaken either before or after placements of the children. As at the time of the pilot, no foster carer was known to have had any assessment carried out after the Social Services became aware of the placements. Foster carers assumed that since they had entered into private arrangements with birth parents, they did not have to inform the Social services Department.

Carers' Motivations: The reason carers gave for private fostering could be classified into two distinct categories: -

a) Because they could not have children of their own and,

b) Altruistic reasons: The urge to do something good for unfortunate members of society out of their love for children in general.

The social workers' view however, was that private fostering was a kind of status symbol to these working class women who needed to demonstrate to the community that they could be useful members of their society through their provision of care and nurturance to seemingly unfortunate children from other cultures. Caring for West African children thus set them apart from others in the community as some kind of special people.

Carers' perception of their roles and duties: Carers perceived their roles as those of substitute parents. They saw their duties not only as providing physical care, but also to provide love and to give the children attention. These roles and duties were performed as if the children were carers' own children. In essence, they viewed their roles like those of adoptive carers. Their commitments to these roles and duties were such that foster carers placed their fostering experiences at the top of their priority lists of things that had given them happiness in life. These experiences were at times only second to those of bringing up their own children.

Support Networks: The main source of support to foster carers (both tangible and intangible) came from their immediate and or extended families, their friends or neighbours, and other groups like doctors, Health Visitors and birth parents. The Social Services (represented by social workers) were rarely mentioned as source of support, and indeed, played marginal roles in private fostering.

vii) Plans for children: There was a general lack of clarity both by Foster carers and social workers about plans for the children's eventual return to their birth families. In all 18 placements, neither the carers nor the social workers knew how long the children were staying; equally, none of the social workers had met any of the birth parents of the children. There were no enforceable agreements on the purposes and duration of placements. The fringe involvement of the Social Services meant that foster carers had no input or training on West African cultures or childrearing practices. It also meant that no placement plans were made and no reviews were carried out to determine whether the placements were still relevant.

Thus a situation prevailed in which fringe social work involvement meant little or no support to carers; also coupled with lack of clear and enforceable agreements on purposes and duration of placements, the result was a high 'care drift' of children in the area.

Finally, the picture emerged of a form of childcare that was a marginalised, low-priority area in childcare services. There was no countywide policies dealing with private fostering and social workers were left to grope in the dark and adopted policies on the 'hop' as they went along. This ran counter to the principles of, and Regulations and guidance to, the Children Act 1989, which integrated private fostering into mainstream childcare legislation in England and Wales.

The findings provided compelling reasons for looking at social work practices and procedures across counties in addition to exploring foster carers' experiences of looking after West African children through private arrangements.

THE MAIN STUDY:

The pilot having been concluded by June 1996, the main data collection was expected to start immediately in three regions of England based upon the returns from the survey of local council areas earlier undertaken. The decision to select three regions for the main study was informed by: -

i). The number of current private fostering placements;

ii). Information from past research or government sponsored studies or inspections.

iii). The need to compare policies and practices relating to private fostering across areas and regions;

iv). Conveniences in terms of ease of movement and the maximisation of limited resources (money and time).

Letters were sent to the Director of Social Services in eight local authorities, requesting their co-operation and assistance; (Appendix four). The letters explained the purpose of the study, why the researcher wanted to do the main study in the areas; and how they were to be involved. They were also informed how they could gain from the study if finished. Five county areas rejected this request outright, giving various reasons for their non-participation. The most prominent amongst these were: -

a) That the study had not obtained the approval of the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS);

b) The area had participated in similar studies in the past.

c) The area of study was not a priority area of the overall childcare concerns of the local authority;

d) The Department had neither the staff nor the resources to commit to the study; and,

e) That the department was not aware of any private fostering situation in the area (even where official statistics had indicated otherwise).

To overcome these hurdles, the approval of the ADSS was sought and obtained after three months. Repeated appeals were also made to these areas by the supervisors of this study but all to no avail. Finally it was decided that the council areas be enticed by the promise of in-service training to their staff in return for their participation. The training was to be in the area of socialisation and childrearing practices of West Africans. While some areas welcomed the idea, others were unmoved by it.

While this was going on, the researcher had joined the " private Fostering Practice Issues Group" under the auspices of the British Agencies For Adoption and Fostering (BAAF). Membership of the group is made up of Social workers, Health Visitors, and other related interest groups all over England who currently deal with children in private foster care or have done so in the past.

This helped the researcher keep track of happenings in various local authorities even when they had declined to help. The negotiations for access lasted between July 1996 until May 1997 when the very first interview for the main study was conducted.

By the time the first interview was held, three authorities had consented (one semi- urban county and two rural counties). The approach to foster carers and Social workers used in the pilot was followed in the main data collection. This was necessary because of the difficulties of obtaining the names and addresses of carers from official records in the departments. However, because Local Authorities did not co-operate initially, it was decided to advertise in shops and supermarkets in towns and villages in Local Authorities that had refused participation. This was done because the survey had shown that there were many private fostering placements in some areas that had

declined to help. This was highlighted when Social workers from these areas brought to the practice issue group dilemmas in dealing with private foster care cases; concerns which bordered on child protection issues.

By the beginning of May 1997 when the first interview was conducted, 82 letters had been sent out to foster carers through the Social Services Departments of the three areas, and only 11 responses had been received. Table 3. 3.

Table 3. 3. Responses to requests for participation by the three areas selected for the main study.

AREA	NO.OF CASES.	LETTERS SENT.	RESPONSES GOT.
A	15	15	3
B	12	10	none
C	57	57	8
D**	UNKNOWN	Advertisement	5**
TOTAL:	84	82	16.

NB. The area represented by the letter '**D**' indicates the areas where advertisements were placed in shop windows. The total responses received include those from the advertisement as well.

Why the Snowball technique was used.

It was hoped that the distribution of cases would make area comparisons possible through a stratified sample of 15 cases in each authority. However as can be seen from table 3.3, only 11 responses were received from all the three areas. As a result of the sample collection problem, the target of 45 carers was regarded as no longer attainable and a decision was taken to obtain a larger number through snowball sampling.

At the end of each interview, the carers were asked whether they knew anyone who was also fostering West African children privately and who would be willing to talk about their experiences.

This technique proved very productive. In fact all the carers in each area knew one another, even when social workers had said that they did not know about other carers than those given the letters. In some instances carers were not given the letters even when social workers knew that they were fostering West African children privately. The reason(s) for this action only became apparent when these carers were interviewed; and it turned out, this method may have helped to reduce the biases that would have been introduced into the study by the actions or non-action of social workers. Table 3.4. below show the sources from where the carers for this study were got.

Table 3.4. Distributions of foster carers by means of how they were sourced.

Local Authorities	No. of referred interviews.	No. of snowball interviews.	Total.
A	3	3	6
B	-	-	0
C	8	5	13
* D	5 by advertisements	13	18
Total			37

* This indicates the authorities where carers were accessed through advertisements in shops and supermarkets.

Interviews with Foster Carers:

Interviews were conducted with 37 private foster carers between the month of May 1997 and March 1998. The foster carers were drawn from three different sources; eight carers (30%) through the local authorities referrals, five (13%) initially through advertisements in shop windows and supermarkets, while 21 carers (57%) were got through the snowballing technique. Out of the total 37 interviews, five were excluded because they fell outside the defined criteria for participation; the carers were either caring for Chinese children or children of dual heritage (3 Chinese and 2 dual heritage children).

The remaining two carers were rejected because the interviews were incomplete. These happened because the interviewees stopped the interviews half way through questioning either because they had to leave the house urgently or as in one case, left the venue because of the news of the death of a member of the family.

All interviews were conducted in respondents' homes. The length of the interviews was between 1-1½ and 2 hours and all interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of the respondents. All the primary respondents were women, but where their husbands or partners were present and willing, they were also interviewed. These interviews with the husbands or male partners centred mostly on their roles as the 'father figures' in the households. In 26 (87 %) cases however, it was only possible to interview the wives. It is difficult to assess what effect, if any, the absence of male figures in some homes had on the responses of the carers in these homes. But the researcher had no control over these matters as the carers were giving their time and hospitality voluntarily; and it was thought not ethical to place any condition for the setting and modes of interviewing.

At the outset of each interview, respondents were informed that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions being asked. The concern was to get their own accounts of their experiences, feelings, and behaviours. In addition, it was made clear that the researcher's affiliation was university based, and that he was not a part of the social services department, but that they were accessed through the department (for those of them who were accessed through the social services) because that was the only way contact could be made with them. It was also stated verbally and in writing that all responses would be treated in the strictest confidence; thus the non-inclusion of names and addresses in any of the data.

Most respondents appeared open and frank about their feelings and experiences (for example, when respondents volunteered information about sensitive subjects such as

painful childhood experiences and childlessness). Quite often it was found that they expressed strong emotions, and some carers became very upset or cried. In such cases the researcher asked whether the interview should be stopped.

Interviewing people where there are possibilities of the disclosure of sensitive information demands tact and sensitivity on the part of the researcher. In addition to my own experience of interviewing in years of work as a social worker, texts on interviewing techniques were also consulted (Barbbie, 1995, Denzin, 1994 and whitaker & Archer, 1989). Respondents were listened to and their accounts explored in depth through encouraging them to say more through probing for variations in their answers to the questions. One also has to acknowledge the difficulties of balancing the urge to control the direction of the interviews with the interviewees' tendencies to talk about issues outside the interests of the research. Carefully steering them back to the topic under discussion whenever they strayed did have the desired effect. Interviewees were told that they could withdraw from the research at any stage or could ask that any part of the interview be omitted. They were also told that they could have transcripts of their interviews if they so desired.

Questionnaires to Social Workers.

The questionnaires to social workers followed those used in the pilot study. The aims were to assess the extent of social workers' involvement in private fostering arrangements in their areas against the background of general expectation of their roles as laid down by the 1989 Children Act.

Questionnaires were sent to social workers that had responsibility for private fostering in the areas where the interviews with foster carers had been conducted. Social workers were asked to return these using the self-addressed stamped Envelopes. However, there were few social workers assigned to supervise private fostering cases in these authorities (in one area there was only one social worker assigned to 25 private foster

carers). Questionnaires were also sent to social workers in those areas where accessed had been obtained through chain-referral techniques.

A total of 135 questionnaires were sent out in the months of March and April 1998 to the three areas identified for the main study and those in which snowball technique had been used to obtain samples of foster carers. By mid May 1998, only four questionnaires had been returned, and letters of reminders were sent out, including telephoning those that could be reached by phone. All these had no effect, as there was no improvement in the response rate from the social workers. A painful decision was therefore taken to abandon the aspect of the research that had to do with comparing policies and practice across Local Authorities. The focus of the study was therefore changed to looking at the experiences of foster carers and West African children looked after by them through private arrangements.

ETHICAL ISSUES:

Conducting this study raised the question about how to present and maintain my roles as a researcher to the families that I was studying. I had to decide how to present my motives, how to structure the interviews, and how intensely I wanted to become involved or know about these families.

I was always aware of the likelihood of my role as a researcher being confused with that of an expert on West African culture and childrearing practices. As an African doing a research on the placement of African children in white households, there was the potential for these families to be less concerned with the research process as an independent endeavour than they were with me as a professional with answers to their childcare problems. In the course of this study, quite often these fears became real in the form of questions such as "do you think that we are doing it badly?" or "why do your people do this to their children?"

The dilemma was whether to make claims to objectivity by not answering these enquiries through 'removing myself from the situation at hand' (Anderson, 1993), or to come clean and express my position and opinions.

More problematic however was how opinions or responses to questions about the researcher's views were to be situated. Could these responses be from the standpoint of a Black male researcher (and a member of an underprivileged group), or a male researcher viewed in the same way as other member of the male gender group. Sometimes during the interviews, interviewees would ask how other carers have answered or responded to a particular question. In most cases I told them that what others had said did not matter as much as what they had to tell me since human experiences differ greatly. 'Whatever was important to them would not necessarily be important to other people and vice versa'.

This response was meant to acknowledge their individual experiences but not to ignore their collective experiences firstly as women and secondly women private foster carers of West African children.

The role of gender is important in considering biases in social science research especially in research where family roles and perceptions are central to the study. Researchers' own gender and /or race may affect their perceptions of how family members carry out roles, for example, gender socialisation, expectations of family members, and comfort levels with person of same or other gender (Finch, 1984). These raise questions of who researchers think is a credible informant, how different relationships are introduced when it is man to man versus woman to woman interviews or man to woman as in the case of this study? Does it shape our perception of what is appropriate or inappropriate in the way the families being studied carry out their functions? I had reservations initially about how foster carers would view or take to me; would I be seen as an embodiment of West African culture? Would foster carers use

their experiences with birth parents as the basis for the nature of information they would disclose to me? And would I in turn use my experience of having been fostered in childhood back in West Africa as the basis for my perception of their role performances and the subsequent relation that was to develop?

Hobson (1978) observed that gender differentiation also comes into play to enable the interviewees to 'place' the interviewer as someone they can share experiences with. This 'placing' and sharing which Boushel (2000) terms as 'experiential affinity' would aid communication and understanding where it exists. But as Mama (1995) argued, most people inhabit several contexts simultaneously and there was therefore the need to recognise both the strengths and limitations of the concept. At another level, it is difficult to say whether any claim to experiential affinity on the basis of my being a black researcher could masks my gender affiliation and the dynamics of gender relationships in what Boushel (Op Cit) also termed 'Experiential interdependence'? These terms as they apply to minority ethnic researchers have received little attention according to Boushel either because minority status have bestowed on Black researchers more awareness and understanding of majority population's attitudes, or because the issue is not a priority for the researchers involved at the moment. Nevertheless, systematic comparisons of men and women interviewers, in a range of research situations have not been done. We lack sufficient studies or accounts of the research process, which consider the relationship of gender of the interviewer to the research products.

Apart from these, other issues were also taken into consideration. These were: -

a) What benefits this study would be to these carers who volunteered to take part?

b) How do I justify their time and the possible distress that might be caused (especially those caused by the threats or actual removal of children by parents during the pilot stage)?

C) What are the ethical implications of the methods of data collection and dissemination?

d) What would happen to the personal data obtained after the research might have been concluded?

As I stated earlier, the methods of collecting data were based on an honest and straightforward approach by giving the interviewees information about the subject matter of the study and requesting their voluntary participation. A respectful stance was maintained to all interviewees' privacy through the periodic checking of their comfort, and if necessary asking that certain segments of the data be withdrawn from the records.

In terms of disseminating the data, this study has been an attempt to find out the state of affairs regarding private fostering since the Children Act 1989 received royal assent. To do this it was important to earn and maintain the trust of foster carers who took part in the study by reassuring them that their identities and any particularly sensitive and private issue would not be disclosed. Very worrying also was whether the respondents and the information they provided could be given adequate protection. They had all revealed very private parts of their lives in return for very flimsy guarantees of confidentiality: my verbal assurance that the materials would be seen in full only by me and the person transcribing the tapes, and that any public reference to them would be anonymous. On reflection, these assurances could not guarantee that official policies arising from the research would not affect the women negatively individually or collectively as women engaged in private fostering. Barnes (1979) sees this situation as one that has always posed both ethical and moral dilemmas to researchers in terms of the right of those researched to privacy and protection, and claims to adding to knowledge about the people or issues studied. On reflection, this was my work and I had a greater degree of control over how the materials could be used. It thus could be assumed to have minimised the danger of the materials being

taken out and use in ways that would breach that confidentiality and trusts. Therefore, justification for this study can or should be seen as adding to knowledge about private fostering in addition to bringing to public attention, the situation and needs of both foster carers and children; thus enabling policy makers and other professionals to do something about the situation.

It is therefore impossible to say whether any of these factors did introduce any biases in the interviews. My experience in social work had taught me to be non-judgemental and to treat each individual as a unique being with his/her individual differences. Taking information from people also meant that I had to respect them as individuals and not see them just as sources of information; Thus the need to see them as fellow humans deserving of dignity and privacy. Through these I was able to make them feel relaxed and to trust me that whatever they told me would be respected.

Their honesty and trusts were shown in the ways that I was received and treated by all foster carers. Their readiness to pick me up from Railway stations and the offers of Teas and Coffees as well as cook meals, were as important as their willingness to link me with other carers through the Snowball or chain-referral techniques.

Throughout this study the confidentiality of the responses of foster carers was always borne in mind. Personal data were held only for the lawful purposes of this study, and were not to be used or disclosed in any manner incompatible with the mentioned purposes. They will be erased after the conclusion of this study. In order to maintain the confidentiality of all carers and the areas where the sample was obtained, all names of individuals, towns, local council areas, and any information that is likely to lead to the identification of any of these participants, have been changed.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Research Methodology:

The strength of qualitative data lies in its richness and depth, as the in-depth interviews with foster carers provided a wealth of information. Further more, this approach allowed the respondents to structure the issue as they saw it, rather than as the researcher saw it. As a result, it was possible to come to a deep understanding of the issues in private fostering from the carers' own perspective (Denzin 1978.).

Comfort is taken in the reliability of the data from the fact that the sample was drawn from a wide variety of areas across the southern part of England and not only from the initial three target areas. However biases in the sample could not be eliminated because of lack of access to a comprehensive list of private foster carers.

This problem may have been counteracted by the use of the "Snowball" or "Chain Referral" technique, (which might also have introduced other biases by leading the study to specific group rather than a representative sample of the target population as a whole). In addition to the problems of chain-referral techniques, this study was limited to the southern half of England; so it could be unrealistic to generalise the results to foster carers throughout the country. In the same vein it will be unrealistic to generalise the results or findings to the whole of the southern half of England.

The impact of gender and race (although discussed in the section on ethical concerns), are issues that might have introduced some negative influence on sampling as well as the sorts of information that was divulged during the interviews. It is impossible to predict what carers' attitude and behaviour would have been had the researcher been white or a female West African doing the research. However, to maximise the advantages of the interviews, they were tape-recorded in full, so all the details could be utilised throughout the research thereby ensuring that no material would be lost from the interviews later on.

SUMMARY.

This chapter set out to describe where the data for this_research were collected, outlining the methods used and the rationale for employing them and how these were analysed. The method of combining both quantitative and qualitative methods in this research has also been explained and discussed. The research design was also chronicled sequentially through the four stages. These ranged from the initial collection of information and data from a survey of all local authorities in England, piloting the research instrument in one county area, qualitative investigation which refer to the in-depth interviewing of foster carers. Data from the in-depth interviews was imputed into the NUD*IST programme and then indexed; categorised and analysed. The SPSS package was used to analyse the socio-economic characteristics of both foster carers and their foster children. Some ethical issues were also discussed.

Finally, the strengths and weaknesses of the study and methodology used were discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR.

OBTAINING INFORMATION FROM SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENTS: DISCUSION.

The survey of local authorities carried out prior to the pilot study gave an indication of the number and distribution of children in private foster care nationally.

One hundred and thirty five questionnaires were sent, out of which 87 responses were received. Only 16 of these authorities recorded that there were West African children on their records who were in private foster placements. Of these, 11 were in the south of England and five in the north of the country.

For the purposes of convenience and ease of access, it was decided that the main data collection would be done in these southern authorities whose returns were consistent with official records on private fostering.

The last official record of private fostering in England and Wales was made in Department of Health Statistics for the year ended 31st march 1991. It showed that both the southern and southwestern regions of England (excluding both the inner and outer London boroughs) had a total of 654-recorded private fostering placements. Thames and Anglian regions had a regional total of 342 placements in the same period. The initial survey of authorities showed the same trend. There were high numbers of private foster placements in Kent, Dorset, Hampshire, Somerset, Wiltshire, East and West Sussex, Surrey, Devon, Cornwall and Avon.

INITIAL CONTACTS WITH THE SELECTED AUTHORITIES.

The initial intention was to do the main study in three areas reflecting urban, semi-urban and rural counties and, or metropolitan areas, but this design proved not to be possible because of the response of Social Services Departments to the research.

Letters were written to the nine authorities whose responses to the survey indicated that there were West African children in private foster placements in the areas. They were thanked them for their initial responses and asked to consider being part of the main study. By their participation it was meant that they would provide access to private foster carers in the area. They would also provide access to social workers that had lead responsibilities for private fostering. Social Services directors were told in the letters that both foster carers and social workers would be interviewed or asked to provide information about their experiences. Thus carers were to be interviewed about looking after West African children through private arrangements and social workers about their statutory responsibilities and activities through questionnaires.

Three Local Authorities replied with enthusiasm and were willing to participate in the research. Six authorities gave negative responses citing their participation in similar research in the past or that this research had not obtained the approval of the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS). One authority in particular wrote back to say that my motive for the study was questionable. The reason being that in view of the political instability in Nigeria, I could be a spy sent by the Nigerian government to track down political dissidents, and I could be using the cover of the study to get to such people through their children. I was therefore asked to allay this fear or feelings. This I did and reassured them that I was sponsored by the university of Bristol and had no connection with the Nigerian government. It later turned out that this particular authority did not have

records of West African children placed in private foster care in its area. In response to the letter of clarification, the performance-monitoring officer for the department wrote: -

> "Our record show only a small number of Black African Children in foster care. None of these are private fostering arrangements. There are very few private fostering cases recorded at all and there is no easy way from our records of identifying from which country the children originate. In the circumstances this may not be a fruitful avenue of research for you if you are especially interested in Nigerian children."

However informal contacts in the area had indicated that there were West African children in placements through private arrangements. I came across these through the snowball technique.

Link persons were appointed in each of the areas that gave their consent for the research. The person's role was to co-ordinate the process and to serve as the main contact with the social services departments and the foster carers. I found the appointment of a link person very useful for it made it easier to gain the confidence of some of the carers and someone to approach when there was any problem. The link persons were also the ones that distributed the letters to foster carers and were also expected to distribute the questionnaires to fellow workers in the various areas.

THE ASSOCIATION OF DIRECTORS OF SOCIAL SERVICES' APPROVAL.

Application for approval was made to the research group of the association in April 1996 and approval was given by the 26th June of the same year. It was indicated in the approval letter that a circular advising all directors of social services of the decision was been sent. The letter also advised that it would be helpful when approaching social services departments to make it clear that the research had the group's support. It also welcomed a short summary of the study when completed in a form suitable for distribution to social services departments. On the basis of the ADSS' letter I again approached these authorities, but their responses were still negative. I was either told that the authorities did not have the

resources to devote to the research or that they had participated in similar research in the past and did not think that it was fair to put foster carers in their areas through another interviews.

MEETINGS WITH LINK OFFICERS.

The appointment of link persons in each area that agreed to participate in the study was useful not only in the ease with which one was able to communicate in the area, but also in terms of obtaining the trust and confidence of both social workers and foster carers. Several meetings were held with the link officers to work out the best methods of contacting foster carers. In all Eighty-two letters were given out to be distributed to 84 known foster carers in the three areas.

However during the interviews with foster carers, it was found that there were other carers in some areas who, although known to the social workers, were not given the letters requesting their participation. This was revealed as a result of asking carers at the end of each interview whether they knew other people in the area who were also fostering Black children, and who would be willing to talk about their experiences. The revelation was that **all** private foster carers in each area knew one another. Not only did carers know each other in the same area; they also knew other carers in other parts of the country. I found that there existed an informal network among private foster carers in most of the areas. Those who had not been given the letter of request said that the social services knew that they were fostering children through private arrangements. The reasons for their exclusion by social workers only became apparent from interviewing them. From their responses, it emerged that they had strained relationships with the departments. They were perceived, as providing poor-quality care but the social services departments had not barred them from

fostering. The impression one got was that these carers were not given the letters of request for participation because they would not portray positive images of the various departments when interviewed by an outsider. These same carers all knew that other carers in the area were given letters of request for participation. This was the measure of communication among the carers in the local authorities.

OBTAINING INFORMATION FROM SOCIAL WORKERS THROUGH CLOSED-ENDED STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRES.

Experience from the pilot showed that information sought from social workers with lead responsibilities for private fostering would be best obtained through closed-ended structured questionnaires. The reasons being that information sought were strictly related to social workers' statutory roles under the Children Act and not their personal experiences as were the case with foster carers. Secondly the questionnaires were posted because during each meeting with managers and senior officials of social Services department, it was decided that because of social workers' workloads, it would not be feasible to have a long question and answer session with each worker. On the part of the researcher both financial and time constraints also determined that it would be cheaper and convenient to use postal questionnaires.

Between March and April 1998 43 questionnaires were sent to social workers in four local authorities through the link persons and, or officials. Thirteen other questionnaires were given out by hand to social workers that were members of the Private Fostering Issue Practice Group under the auspices of the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF). These were social workers in areas where formal consent had been denied but in

which interviews with carers had been conducted through the snowball technique. Table 4.1 below portrays this clearly.

Table. 4.1. **Questionnaires sent out and responses received from social workers.**

Local Authority.	No of letters sent.	Responses.
A	15	0
B	15	2
C	1	0
D	15	2
Others.	13	2
Total.	56.	6.

NB. Local Authority C *was sent one questionnaire because there was only one worker working with all the private foster carers in the area as at the time of contact.*

All areas and officials were asked to return the questionnaire by the end of July 1998. Reminders were sent to all social workers and link persons who either received the questionnaires directly or through the link persons in each core authority at the end of June. These were followed by Telephone contacts as well. In one area the only social worker working with private foster carers complained that the information sought demanded a thorough search from files. This the worker said was impossible because there was either no time to do that or that such information did not exist in the format asked for by the researcher. In practice all that social workers were asked to provide, was information about procedures for assessing foster carers who foster through private arrangements; How the departments supervised these carers; the nature and systems of support to carers; and whether they could provide information about how the local authorities had satisfied themselves that the welfare of West African children who were fostered in the area, had been safeguarded and promoted.

In another instance, an area manager rang to say that there were no West African children in private foster placements in the area and by the same token, social workers

would not be in the position to provide information on their role performances with regard to these children. When told that interviews had actually been conducted with private foster carers in the same area and it was the link officer who had sent the letters to the carers, the official then said that the matter was going to be cleared with higher authorities at the head office. There has never been any feedback from the officer's consultation with the head office even after several reminders both to the officer and the link person. After several attempts to improve the response rate from social workers through letters and personal Telephone calls, it was decided that it was no longer wise to wait indefinitely. The decision was therefore taken to abandon that aspect of the research dealing with social workers' statutory role performances in relation to West African children in private foster placements. The research was now to concentrate on the analysis of the interviews with Foster carers about their experiences of fostering West African children.

LESSONS FROM ATTEMPTS TO OBTAIN INFORMATION FROM SOCIAL WORKERS.

Experience from the efforts to do this research especially with regards to gaining access to information from social services departments indicated that not only is private fostering a low priority area of childcare, it does not have a high profile in the structure of social services. Thus it is still a marginalised area of childcare in England. All the core areas of the research with the exception of Essex were said to have clear policies and procedures for private fostering as at the time of this study. They were also the areas that had participated in the Social Services Inspection (SSI) of private fostering and cited as areas of good practices. It is difficult to know how good these areas are with regard to private fostering because of their failure to provide information. Inconsistencies

encountered in these areas with regard to where information about any child in private foster placement is held was enough indication that the policies and procedure guidelines in these areas, were not used effectively to safeguard and promote the welfare of those children for whom the policies and guidelines were drawn.

THE PLACE OF PRIVATE FOSTERING IN SOCIAL SERVICES STRUCTURE.

Not knowing from which section or team in the social service structure information about private fostering could be obtained was the initial indication that things were not right. There were great variations in the structure of social services departments and where private fostering was located within them across the country when the responses from the local authorities' survey were received. Responses were received from Family Placement Units, Quality control Departments, Children and Families' Teams, Adoption and Fostering Teams, and in some cases, from the planning Departments. The same also applies to the location of all services for children. Obtaining information about a service that was of low priority to local authority was very difficult. In doing this research and seeking information either about children or carers, it was found that not only was private fostering poorly supervised, but that it was variously located in a variety of teams or sections in the set up of many local authority social services

This situation made it difficult to know which team or teams to deal with even in one local authority. This was also reflected in the lack of a coherent body of information on private fostering. There were instances where social workers in one team would do the pre-placement inspections, others would supervise the placements while different workers in another team would deal with issues around child protection if children were deemed as at

risk. Thus three different teams in the same office or department would hold information about one child in private foster placement.

At another level it can be said that probably the lack of attention to private fostering by senior managers has to a greater extent contributed to the situation experienced lower down the hierarchy in the Social Services structure. Senior managers demonstrated this in their responses to the initial request to undertake the research in their areas. The 11 authorities that responded from the south of England with the exception of one, initially refused to participate in the research. The reasons they gave were either "we do not have the staff or the resources to devote to help you in the research" or "private fostering constitutes only a small proportion of the childcare services dealt with in this authority." This was even after the approval of the Association of Directors of Social Services was obtained. This unwillingness to get involved by officials of the social services departments was continually played out at all levels of the Social Services structure.

It might be the case that senior managers in these areas did not think a PhD dissertation important enough to co-operate with. Even social workers in areas where the managers had given the go ahead were sometimes uncooperative and unwilling to assist. Thus the lack of responses from social workers from areas where interviews had been conducted with foster carers. Attempts to control access to information were noted in social workers' attempts to select particular carers to be interviewed from among the many on their records that were fostering West African children through private arrangements. These attitudes by officials of the Social Services departments encountered first at the point of contact with senior managers, and at the point of contact with foster carers, as well as at the point of attempts to obtain information from social workers, have demonstrated the scenario regarding private fostering.

Consequently, unless top management change their attitudes towards private fostering and give it equal priority and status with local authority fostering, this aspect of childcare services will continue to be relegated to the bottom rung of Social Services' lists of services for children. By implication therefore field officers will also regard private fostering as a low priority aspect of their roles. The pilot study did show that social workers were not always sure of what the reactions of top managers would be to their removing a child from an unsuitable private fostering placement. The fear was the resource implications on the local authority or the department of taking such action.

In the case of the core areas of this research, having well-defined policies and procedure guidelines for private fostering was no guarantee that the welfare of West African children privately fostered in these areas were safeguarded and promoted as directed by the Guidance and Regulations to the Children Act 1989.

In the absence of any information and data to the contrary, and in view of several aborted attempts to obtain these from social workers, one is left with no option than to speculate as to the effectiveness of the policies (where they exist) in promoting the welfare of those children in private fostering placements in these areas. Social workers' performances of their statutory roles, on the basis of the evidence here, can not be said to be any better than the situation was before the Children Act 1989. Therefore no matter the structure of Local authorities and where private fostering is located within it, unless top management of these areas see it as area of priority, private fostering will ever remain the "Cinderella" of childcare services in England.

CHAPTER FIVE.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF FOSTER CARERS.

This chapter discusses the characteristics of those who foster West African children through private arrangements. It looks at the age distribution of the carers, their marital status, housing, their levels of educational attainments and income levels. The chapter will look at carers' motivations for fostering, how many children of their own they have had, how many children they were fostering at the time, and how many they said they had fostered in the past. The duration for which carers had been fostering is also looked at in addition to the reasons carers said parents gave, for fostering their children.

State Foster carers.

Bebbington and Miles (1990) provided the most comprehensive picture of state foster carers in England from a survey of 13 local authorities.

In the study foster carers were found to be different from other families in the community in four important respects:

i. Nine out of 10 lived in homes with three or more bedrooms.

ii. Four-fifth of carers was aged between 31 and 55 years old;

iii. Two-thirds had one partner working full-time and the other not at all, and,

iv. Only one in eight had a child of their own who was less than five years.

In a review of foster care research, Berridge (1997) concluded that the average age of foster carers was higher than for mothers with dependent children across society. Seven in every eight foster households consisted of two parents while female foster carers

were found to have more children than other women of comparable age and marital status. Berridge's review showed that there was no evidence to support the view that unemployment encouraged people to foster; and that the social class of foster carers was representative of wider society.

Private foster carers.

Research findings on the characteristics of private foster carers are very scanty. The few data there are come from Holman (1973), Save the Children Fund (1994), Race Equality Unit (1993), and Department of Health (DOH, Sign Post, 1994).

Holman (1973) from a study of 143 private foster families in the English Midland, concluded that private foster carers came predominantly from low-income families; tended to be married, residing in the area of their birth, with two to four children of their own, and having started to foster before they were forty. Private foster carers were found to have more birth children of their own at home and were younger at the time they commenced fostering.

The Save the Children (1997) study revealed that most private foster carers were middle aged (the average age being 51 years), had teenage or adult children of their own. Carers lived almost exclusively in public housing. Unemployment was higher among private foster husbands than for other fostering. The typical profile of a private foster carer was:-

> "A mature woman having raised her own children, well established or known in the community, with energy and experience of children to offer, living in council housing estate and drawing benefits or pension" (Save the Children, 1997.pp. 26).

Social workers and health visitors saw these characteristics as sound bases for successful caring for children the study concluded. This conclusion was however reached from a very small sample drawn from only three local authorities.

THE AGE CHARACTERISTICS OF CARERS IN THE STUDY.

At the time of the study 17 or 57 percent of the carers were in the fifty years age bracket. Table 5.1 demonstrates the age distribution.

Table 5.1. Age distribution of carers.

Age Group	**No**	**%**
20—29	1	3
30—39	3	10
40—49	4	13
50—59	17	57
60+	5	17
Total.	**30**	**100.**

The mean age of the carers was 52 (S.d.=10) with a range from 28 to 72 years. The oldest carer, apart from having had two children of her own had also adopted two other children in addition to the three West African children she was fostering. She was fostering children in their teenage years between 11 and 15 years. None of her biological or adopted children was still staying with her. The fostered children were her main source of emotional support because her husband was frail and unable to do a lot for her in and around the house. All three children were fostered within six months of birth and had been in the same household ever since. Nearly two-thirds of the carers (22 or 73 %) were above 50 years. In terms of the age distribution, this appeared similar to both Holman and Save the Children's findings. Table. 5.2 on the next page gives a summary of the characteristics of the foster families.

Table. 5.2. Characteristics of Foster Families.

	mean	**S.d.**
Age of foster Carers	52	10
Age of child at placement	3.00	3.01
Current age of child	3.17	2.86
Number of foster children	2.30	1.02
Number of foster carers' own children	3.00	1.93
Number of Bedrooms	3.27	0.83
Number of people in households	4.9	2
	N	**%**
Married families	20	67
Lone parents	10	33
Council tenants	16	53
Home owners	10	33
Private rented homes	4	13
Educational attainments.		
Secondary education only.	23	77
Some/full voc/prof. Training.	7	23
Household income levels.		
	N	**%**
- £10,000 or less per annum	21	70
£10---£15,000 per annum.	6	20
£16---£20,000 per annum	2	7
£25,000 and above.	1	3

Marital status of carers.

The study revealed that of the 30 foster carers, two-third were married, while the rest were living in single-parent households alone with their own children or their foster

children. Table 5.3 below gives a picture of the cross-tabulation of carers' age versus their marital status.

Table. 5.3. Age versus marital status cross-tabulation.

Age Groups Of Female Carers.	**Marital status.**							
	married		Separated		Divorced		Widowed	
	No	**%**	**No**	**%**	**No**	**%**	**No**	**%**
20---29	1	100	-	-	-	-	-	-
30---39	3	100	-	-	-	-	-	-
40---49	3	75	-	-	-	-	1	25
50—59	11	65	-	-	4	23	2	12
60+	2	40	1	20	-	-	2	40
Total.	20		1		4		5	

Types of housing.

Over half (53%) of the carers were council tenants. However 33 percent of them owned those council homes and the remaining four households were in privately rented houses. When the types of housing were cross-tabulated against the number of bedrooms in each house, the following picture emerged. The majority of the council tenants (i.e. 14 out of 16) were in three bedroom type houses; six of the owner-occupier type houses were also three bedrooms. On the whole the predominant types of housing were three bedroom council houses.

Number of foster children in each household. The average number of children per household was 2.3. The maximum number was four children in four households. The minimum was one child in eight households.

Both the Save the Children study and the Social Services Inspection of private fostering had expressed fears that under-notification of placements by carers would mean that carers would take in more children than the law allows. Presently the Regulations and Guidance to the 1989 Children Act provides that only three children or more (if they are

siblings) can be fostered at a time by a foster carer without a special exemption. While 26 carers kept within the legal limit of three children, four households had four children each without permission.

Level of education and employment statuses of carers.

Twenty- three or 77 percent of the carers had some or full secondary education, and the remaining seven carers had some forms of vocational and/or professional training either as nurses or nursery assistants. However 27 or 90 percent of them were not employed while three said they were self-employed.

The level of education was cross-tabulated against the level of income distribution. The finding was consistent with Holman (1973) and the Save the Children (1997). (i.e. their levels of income were less than the average national income). Twenty-one or 70 percent of the carers earned less than £10,000 per annum. Of this number, 17 were in the category of those that have only had some or full secondary education. Six households were in the income brackets of those earning between ten and fifteen thousand pound sterling per annum. Two households earned between sixteen and twenty thousand pounds per annum, while one household earned over twenty six thousand pounds a year.

This also confirmed that most carers were drawn from those with low educational attainment as well as being in the lower social classes. However when level of income was cross-tabulated against the types of housing ownership, an interesting picture did emerged. Seven out of the 21 households earning less than Ten thousand pounds per annum owned their own homes and only one carer in the income bracket between sixteen and twenty thousand pounds per annum was in owner-occupier type home.

Number of people in each household.

The occupancy rate had a mean of 5. (Five persons per household). The largest number of persons per house was eight and the minimum was two persons. The mean for number of foster children per household was 2.

CHILDLESSNESS AND MOTIVATION TO FOSTER.

Table 5.4. Foster carers' own children versus their foster children cross-tabulation.

No of foster children	No of foster carers' own children.						Total. N=30
	0	1	2	3	4	5+	
1—2	3	-	3	5	3	3	17
3	1	2	2	1	-	3	9
More than three	1	-	1	-	-	2	4
Total.	5	2	6	6	3	8	30

The study examined the relationship between childlessness and motivation to foster; (i.e. to find out if childlessness was a factor of foster carers' motivation to foster). However the sample contained only five women who never had children of their own and these women were at the time of the research fostering a total of 12 children. Two were fostering two children each, one had three children, and one other had one child while the fifth had four children. The picture that emerged was that these were no different from carers who had children of their own. Thus childlessness was not particularly the motivating factor for their desires to foster. Table 5.4 shows the cross-tabulation of the number of foster carers' own children versus the number of foster children in their households. The table showed a positive relationship between having had own children and fostering more. It showed that the more birth children carers have had, the more likely that they were going to foster more children, and that carers who have had no children of their own were not likely to foster more children.

The total number of carers' own children was 88 as against the 69 foster children. Of these, only sixteen were still at home with their natural parents. All the sixteen children (nine females and seven males) still at home were over 18 and over school age.

CARERS' FOSTERING HISTORIES.

A majority of the carers had been fostering for very long periods. Their previous experiences included fostering other children either for the local authorities or children from ethnic and racial backgrounds other than West Africans. Eighty seven percent of carers had been fostering West African children through private arrangements for between 11 and 31 years or over. Twenty-two of these 26 were in the age group of between 50 and 70 years or over. The impression one got from the data was that private fostering was essentially a kind of childcare that was carried out by the same group of people or those within the same age group, who usually began many years ago. The maximum number of years some had been fostering was 42 years and the minimum was two years. Thus it can be said that most foster carers in this study had lengthy experiences of fostering West African children and would be expected to have acquired considerable experiences and expertise in the areas of West African childrearing practices, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. How true this assumption is will be demonstrated in chapter seven dealing with issues around carers' knowledge of the children's cultural, racial and linguistic backgrounds. It also appeared that this group of people was a diminishing group in the sense that the same people seemed to have been fostering with little new entrants into the 'profession'. Holman's study showed similar age groups engaged in private fostering; these were also repeated in both the Save the Children and the SSI studies. It might be as a result of sampling problems or some other biases in those studies. However, from this study and the ones mentioned, one might be tempted to assume that as times goes on, it seems that there may come a time when current carers may be too old to take in more children.

HOW CARERS HAVE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN IN THE PAST.

Table 5.5. How carers have looked after children in the past.

How carers have looked after children in the past.	**Frequency**	**%**
Local authority children.	9	30
Child minder	6	20
Worked in children's homes.	2	7
Friends/neighbours' children.	3	10
Worked as a nanny.	3	10
None	7	23
Total.	30	100

Twenty-three or 77 percent of the sample had had experiences of looking after children prior to fostering through private arrangements. To expand on these responses carers were asked to explain how they had looked after children in the past.

Of the 14 carers who had applied to foster for the local authority, eight had gone on to have children placed with them. Three were rejected, two said they were accepted but never given any child, while one said that she withdrew her application.

No carer had had any experience of looking after West African children prior to doing private fostering. All those who had looked after children apart from their own children had looked after white children only. As with infertility, rejection by Local Authority was not a primary reason for fostering. Four carers said they decided to foster through private arrangements because they had no children of their own. The fifth said that she adopted two girls and they wanted a baby brother but she could not adopt any more and therefore decided to foster little babies but she could only get them through the Nursery World magazine.

REASONS FOR FOSTERING THROUGH PRIVATE ARRANGMENTS.

Four carers said they decided to foster through private arrangements because they had no children of their own. The fifth carer who had no child of her own said that she adopted two girls and she wanted a baby brother; but because she could not adopt any more, she decided to foster little babies that were only available through the Nursery World magazine.

The notion of rescuing unfortunate and less privileged children could also be deduced as one of the motivations of foster carers. Fifty three percent of the sample said that they went into private fostering because they loved babies or had fondness for children. These were also the carers that were disposed to take in more children. Six of them had three children each at the time of interviewing; five had two each and one had four privately fostered children with them.

Following this group was a group of carers who said their primary motivation was to have large families or enlarge their families. Two carers said they were fostering because of their childhood experiences of been fostered themselves. The motivation to foster for these carers was their identification with the plight of the children, which reflected their own childhood.

Their reasons were: -

> "Well my husband, he was fostered. His parents died very young when he was six, and so they were all moved up here and he was fostered out you know. That's what really made us start fostering after w had our own family" (Respondent).

> "I have always liked Black children because I was born in the West Indies. I was born in Jamaica and all my nannies were Black nannies and all my friends were Black children. My father was a missionary. I have had lots of Black friend when I in college and doing my nursing. So I just like them that is all." (Respondent).

A common thread seems to run through the responses of the 53 percent (16 carers) who said that they fostered either because they loved babies or had concerns for children. What seem to emerge is the notion that these people are performing some forms of community services by way of rescuing these children and thereby sharing what they have with those unfortunate not to be privileged to have. A few quotations from these responses will help highlight this.

"We wanted some babies in the house to start with. I was thinking about having another baby but thought, well it's pointless. We had three healthy children and it seemed an ideal thing to do fostering and give home to other children; but I didn't want to do it through social services with problem children." (Respondent who had 3 children of her own).

"I don't know really. I think you have to admit there is something about a Black child that is just beautiful. When they are babies and they are grown up... I don't know, it's just something that we got into and I have enjoyed every minute of it."

(Respondent who had no child of her own).

"Because I think they are adorable, they are absolutely gorgeous. No different from white children but there is something about them that is different from white children. More placid, I don't know but they are different and lovely."

(Respondent had two children of her own).

"I don't know really. I don't mind what colour they are. I just love children and there seemed to be so many of them needing homes going by the advertisements in the Nursery World. The social services and the different children Homes weren't so keen on white families taking Black children...And I think it is very difficult now. They are trying to put them in with Black families if they can." (Respondent had one child of her own).

Respondent who had no child of her own said;

"It was a challenge. I used to see them in Kingswood very neglected, very down at the heel and they were with families who didn't seem to oil their hair or skin or look after them properly. I thought I could make a better job of this. I could love them in a better way and let them know their own culture than what the others were doing...So I knew what they had go through if they were neglected or anything."

While collectively these responses fall within the category of those who said they loved babies and/or had concerns for children, wider interpretations can also be given to the responses as a result of further probing questions. Although on the surface these carers said that they had concerns for the children, 40 percent of them also wanted the children to fill the empty nests left by their natural children who had moved out to

form their own households. The knowledge that local authority children were not within the young age range these women wanted to foster, led them to Black children who were often advertised in magazines and supermarket shop windows.

Some of the women fostered Black children as a way of providing companion to an only child or they desired a child of a particular sex to bring up. Fostering through private arrangements provided the women some measures of control and power over what they were doing since the birth parents were often not available and visited infrequently and supervision by social workers limited. (This is an issue that is discussed fully in chapter 8).

The Number of West African children each carer had fostered since they started.

Questions were asked about the total number of children they had fostered. A few of the carers had in the past made attempts to keep records of the number of children who had come and gone, but this was usually the exception rather than the rule. The only other way was to count the children from the photographs that carers kept as reminders of the children who had been in their homes but had left. This too had its drawbacks as not all children had had their photographs taken whilst in the foster households. The figures given here were either from carers' recollections or counting the photographs provided by them.

Eleven carers had fostered between 11 and 20 children each, eight had fostered up to 10 children each, and six said that they had fostered 50 or more children since they started their fostering career. Three other carers had fostered between 41 and 50 children each since they started. The remaining two said that they had fostered between 21 and 30 children since they started. There was a relationship between the length of time carers had been fostering and the number of children each carer had fostered since the beginning of their fostering career.

Agreement on the duration of placements.

Regulations and Guidance to the 1989 Children Act stipulates that parties to any placement must also agree on the reason(s) and duration of the placement. Twenty-eight or 93 percent of the carers said that there was such an agreement. But in only two cases was this a written agreement. Twenty-six said that it was a verbal agreement they entered into with the parents of the children.

The question was then asked about how long the children were expected to stay with the foster carers. No carer gave any specific date when the children were expected to return home. Eighteen carers said that as far as they were concerned, the children were staying until they finish their schooling. Four said until the parents completed their own studies, three until the natural mothers got good jobs, and the remaining three said until the parents got good or adequate housing. These responses excluded those two carers who said that they had written agreement about the duration of the children's placements. This thus indicated the fact that no concrete agreements were entered into when children are placed in private foster care. The duration and purposes of placements were found to be very vague with no clear-cut time limits on how long the child would be in placement. The implications of this state of affairs and the children's eventual return home to their birth parents will be looked at in chapter seven.

A summary of the characteristics of private foster carers in the study.

The aim here was to give a profile of those who foster West African children through private arrangements. The conclusions from other studies cited earlier have been confirmed in this study in many ways. Firstly, many of the respondents were in the lower income or class groups; they were all white and living mainly in rural areas. Secondly, they were mainly council tenants, usually married, and likely to have had children of their own who had moved out or were still at home. Implicit in the

motivation of this group of foster carers was the desire to start another family after their own children had grown and moved out to start their own families. Little black children thus replaced the empty nest left by foster carers' children who had moved on.

The reasons for fostering were varied, ranging from those who said they did it out of their loved of, or fondness of children; or rescuing the children from unfortunate circumstances. To those who were unable to have children of their own, the desires to fulfil their maternal needs had pushed them to apply to foster for the local authorities but either because of their ages or other circumstances relating to their past histories, they had been rejected. Private fostering thus offered these women the opportunity to fulfil these maternal needs.

It was however not demonstrated that most of the carers were rejected as local authority foster carers prior to doing private fostering as other studies had found. (Holman 1973. AFAS 1988/89. S.S.I 1994. R.E.U 1993). Only three out of 14 carers who had applied to foster for the local authority had been turned down. Whether this implies a bias in their samples or samples for this study it cannot be ascertained at the moment. Eighty-six percent of the carers had been fostering between 11 and 31 or more years at the time of the study. The longest any one of them had been fostering was 42 years and the shortest duration was two years.

Table 5.6. A summary table of Foster Carers' Private Fostering Career.

Case No.	Age of Carer	Length of Time Fostering	No of children in Current placement.	Duration in Current placement			
				Child 1	Child 2	Child 3	Child 4
1	56 years	21 years	4	17 Yrs	13 Yrs	8 Yrs	8 Yrs
2	50 years	14 years	1	1½ Yrs			
3	51 years	15 years	4	3 Weeks	2 months	5 Weeks	4 month
4	67 years	42 years	1	3 Yrs			
5	53 years	35 years	2	3½ Yrs	5 months		
6	50 years	14 years	3	17 Yrs	12½ Yrs	2 Yrs.	
7	45 years	11 years	2	3 Yrs	1 Yrs		
8	59 years	35 years	3	13 Yrs	12 Yrs	8½ Yrs	
9	53 years	18 years	2	4 Yrs	3½ Yrs		
10	57 years	17 years	4	15½ Yrs	16 Yrs	11 Yrs	9 Yrs
11	58 years	35 years	3	15 Yrs	14 Yrs	7 Yrs	
12	49 years	8 years	2	9 months	3 Weeks		
13	28 years	7 years	3	3½ Yrs	1½ Yrs	5 months	
14	50 years	20 years	3	13½ Yrs	7 Yrs	3½ Yrs	
15	38 years	12 years	3	2 Yrs	5½ Yrs	1½ Yrs	
16	55 years	22 years	2	6 months	1 Yr.		
17	39 years	12 years	2	4½ Yrs	2 Yrs		
18	53 years	28 years	1	5 Yrs			
19	52 years	28 years	2	2 months	2 months		
20	53 years	13 years	3	8 Yrs	3½ Yrs	1 Yr.	
21	59 years	18 years	3	4 Yrs	3 Yrs	6 months	
22	60 years	18 years	1	1½ Yrs			
23	65 years	33 years	1	2 Yrs			
24	71 years	27 years	1	3 Yrs			
25	52 years	15 years	2	2 Yrs	6 months		
26	72 years	34 years	3	16 Yrs	14 Yrs	10½	
27	30 years	10 years	1	9 Yrs			
28	50 years	12 years	1	10 Yrs			
29	49 years	28 years	4	15 Yrs	14 Yrs	12 Yrs	9 Yrs
30	41 years	2 years	2	1½	6 months		

Table 5.7. A summary of Foster Carers' Private Fostering Career showing current age of each child.

Case No.	Age of Carer	Length of Time Fostering	No of children in Current placement.	Current age of each child in placement			
				Child 1	Child 2	Child 3	Child 4
1	56 years	21 years	4	17 Yrs	15Yrs	10 Yrs	9 Yrs
2	50 years	14 years	1	3 Yrs			
3	51 years	15 years	4	7 Yrs	3½ Yrs	2 Yrs	5 month:
4	67 years	42 years	1	3 Yrs			
5	53 years	35 years	2	4 Yrs	6 months		
6	50 years	14 years	3	17 Yrs	14 Yrs	2½ Yrs.	
7	45 years	11 years	2	9 Yrs	3 Yrs		
8	59 years	35 years	3	16Yrs	14 Yrs	11 Yrs	
9	53 years	18 years	2	4 Yrs	5 Yrs		
10	57 years	17 years	4	17 Yrs	16 Yrs	11 Yrs	9 Yrs
11	58 years	35 years	3	15 Yrs	14 Yrs	8 Yrs	
12	49 years	8 years	2	2½ Yrs	4 Yrs		
13	28 years	7 years	3	4½ Yrs	2 Yrs	8 months	
14	50 years	20 years	3	14 Yrs	10Yrs	8 Yrs	
15	38 years	12 years	3	13 Yrs	6 Yrs	1½Yrs	
16	55 years	22 years	2	2½ Yrs	3½ Yr.		
17	39 years	12 years	2	6 Yrs	3 Yrs		
18	53 years	28 years	1	5½ Yrs			
19	52 years	28 years	2	6 Yrs	5 Yrs		
20	53 years	13 years	3	8 Yrs	4Yrs	1½ Yr.	
21	59 years	18 years	3	5½ Yrs	5 Yrs	2½ mont	
22	60 years	18 years	1	1½ Yrs			
23	65 years	33 years	1	2½ Yrs			
24	71 years	27 years	1	5 Yrs			
25	52 years	15 years	2	2 Yrs	1 Yr		
26	72 years	34 years	3	16 Yrs	14 Yrs	11 Yrs	
27	30 years	10 years	1	14Yrs			
28	50 years	12 years	1	14 Yrs			
29	49 years	28 years	4	16 Yrs	14 Yrs	12 Yrs	9 Yrs
30	41 years	2 years	2	3 Yrs	1½		

CHAPTER SIX:

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FOSTER CHILDREN.

This chapter discusses the characteristics of the West African children in the sample for this study.

There were 69 children made up of 37 girls and 32 boys. The characteristics of these children and the patterns of their placements are discussed below.

The Age Distribution.

Table 6.1. Age distribution by gender.

Age Categories.	Gender.				Total	
	Male		Female			
	No	%	No.	%	No.	%
0-2 years.	7	22	9	24	16	23
3-4 years.	5	17	7	19	12	17
5-6 years.	2	6	7	19	9	13
7-8 years.	2	6	2	5	4	6
9-10 years.	3	9	3	8	6	9
11-12 years.	3	9	1	3	4	6
13-14 years.	7	22	2	5	9	13
15-16 years.	3	9	5	14	8	12
Above sixteen.			1	3	1	1
Total.	32	100.	37	100.	69.	100.

The average age of the children was 4 years. The youngest child was five months old and the eldest 17 years old. Twenty three percent of the children were two years and below; followed by those in the 3-4 years age group who made up 17 percent of the children. Thus those children who were below five years of age made up 41 percent of the sample. There were more girls (23%) than there were boys (18%) in the under five-age group.

In the pilot study, there were also more girls than there were boys (11 girls and 7 boys). Of the 18 children in the pilot, 72 percent were under five years.

Seventy- eight percent was placed before their first birthday. The pilot also showed that girls were placed much earlier than boys were. Ten children were in placements for less than 18 months at the time of the pilot.

Age at the time of placement.

Apparently Forty five percent of the children were fostered within the first six months of their lives. When looked at within 24 months of birth there were still more female children than male. There were 56 children placed within this age range out of which 31 were females and 25 males. Six children were placed at age 55 months or above. The data showed that children in the study were fostered at very young ages.

Duration in placement.

Table. 6.2. Duration of placements.

Duration of placement.	**No.**	**%**
One day to six months.	13	19
7------12 months.	4	6
13----18 months.	5	7
19----24 months.	3	4
25----30 months.	2	3
31----36 months.	4	6
37----42 months.	5	7
43----48 months.	2	3
49---54 months.	1	1
55 months and above.	30	44
Total	69	100.

The picture that emerged showed that nearly half the children (44%) had been in their placements for Four and a half years or over. The next largest group were those who were in placement for six months or fewer (19%) (Table 6.2).

The gender distribution of the duration of placements showed that more females were in placements 12 months prior to the time of the interviews.

There were 12 females and five males in this category. However more boys were in placements longer than girls for those children who had stayed in placements for four and a half years or more at the time of the interviews. The remaining 26 children who were neither in the one day to six months nor the 55 months and over, were virtually evenly distributed within the groups seven to twelve months and 43-48 months.

Birth parents' occupation at the time of placing their children.

Foster carers were asked about what they knew about the occupation of the children's parents at the time the children were placed. Since foster carers did not have any recorded information with regard to birth parents' occupation, they relied on the reasons given to them verbally about why parents could not look after the children themselves. The occupations listed here relate to those of the principal individuals who made the fostering arrangements from the birth parents' side. In answer to the question "What did the parents (i.e. the parent(s) who made the placement) say they were doing and could not look after their children?" Twenty-nine (42%) of the children had parents who were in full time employment. Twenty three (33%) others had parents who were studying full time for various qualifications; For 13 (19%) of the children, their parents were said to be studying part-time and also working part-time at the time they placed their children. The remaining four children (6%), the parents were either in self-employment or engaged in business.

Table.6.3 Birth parents' occupation.

Birth parents' Occupation.	**Number of children**	
	No	**%**
Full time study	23	33
Full time work	29	42
Part-time study/work.	13	19
Self employment/business	4	6
Total.	69	100

It ought to be remembered that the information was given at the time the children were placed and for those who were studying whose children would have been in placements for five years or over, this information might have become obsolete by the time this research was conducted.

Prior to the mid 1980s much discussion and research on private fostering had focused predominantly on West African student -families whose residence in the United Kingdom was intended to be relatively brief (Holman 1973, Ellis, 1971/78, and Goody and Muir 1977). However, research undertaken by the African Family Advisory Services (AFAS); a training and consultancy Division of the Save the Children Fund, in 1988/89 found that 66 percent of the parents of the children in their sample of 209 children were permanently resident in West Africa. The majority of children in the current study had parents who were in full time work mainly in London.

A combination of full time work or part-time work and study would have been responsible for the decision to seek someone who would be responsible for the childcare duties twenty four hours while the parents concentrate on the business of earning a livelihood or gaining a qualification. The issues also brings to the fore the complexities of private fostering and the confusion about what parents really want for their children by engaging in this practice; complexities that were amply discussed in chapter one.

Children's contact with birth parents.

The maintenance of contacts between children either in Local Authority foster care or private foster care with their birth parents is given prominence in the regulations and Guidance to the Children Act 1989. Specifically relating to private fostering, part 1.4.34. states that "where the proposed or actual private foster parent is from a different racial or cultural group to that of the child, the local authority should make the foster parent aware of the need to make provisions that would enable close link to be maintained with the child's

cultural heritage; as well as making arrangements for contact with natural parents so that the child knows where he/she stands and is reassured that his/her family cares" (paragraph 1.4.36). Contact in this case was defined as any forms of interaction that the child had with the birth parents. It could be Telephone calls, letters, personal visits by birth parents or when the children go home on weekends or during school holidays.

Table 6.4. Children's contact with parent versus gender cross-tabulation.

Contact with parents	**Male**		**Female**		**Total**	
	No.	**%**	**No.**	**%**	**N**	**%**
Yes.	27	84	36	97	63	91
No.	5	16	1	3	6	9
Total.	**32**	**100**	**37**	**100**	**69**	**100**

In this sample 63 children (91%) were having some form of contact with their birth parents. Nine percent had no contact with their parents at all. Of those who had contact, 57 percent were girls and the remaining 43 percent were boys. Of the six who had no contacts at all, five were boys.

Nature of contacts.

Table 6.5. Gender Versus Nature of contact cross-tabulation.

Nature of contacts.	**Gender.**				**Total**	
	Male		Female			
	No	**%**	**No**	**%**	**No**	**%**
Visits by parents.	12	38	14	38	26	37
Visits & Telephone calls.	7	22	6	16	13	19
Parent(s) Telephone only.	3	9	8	22	11	16
Child goes home to parents.	3	9	6	16	9	13
Parent(s) write Letters only.	2	6			2	3
Telephone &Letters.			2	5	2	3
No contact.	5	16	1	3	6	9
Total.	**32**	**100.**	**37**	**100**	**69**	**100.**

Thirty eight percent of the children were visited by their parents. Nineteen percent had a combination of visits and telephone; sixteen percent communicated with their parents by Telephone only, while nine children went home to their parents on weekends or during school holidays. Two children kept in touch by letters and two others maintained contacts by both Telephones and letters. Fourteen children were in sibling groups made up of nine girls and five boys in five households. The cohort was made up of two groups of fours and three of twos. The nature of contact for these children in the sibling group were as follow:

i) Six children went home either at weekends or during school holidays;

ii) Six others were visited by parents and

iii) Two others who were female communicated through letters.

Of the 26 who were visited or had contacts through visits by parents, 14 were females and the other 12 were male. More females than male children communicated by Telephones only. There were eight females against three males in this category. In the same vein, more females went home to birth parents than male children did. While six females did go home during school holidays, only three male children did.

The most frequently used forms of contact by both parents and children were parental visits, telephone calls or a combination of both (Table 6.5).

Frequency of contacts.

The frequency of contacts ranged from those who had weekly contacts and those who only communicated once a year. The data showed that girls had more frequent contacts with the parents than the boys. While three girls had weekly contact, no boy weekly contact. Twenty-four girls had fortnightly contact but only twelve boys had this frequency of contact. Twenty-one children had monthly contacts out of which 15 were girls

and six were boys. Of the 16 children who had contacts once in three months, 12 were boys and the remaining four were girls.

Table 6.6. Contacts with parents versus gender cross-tabulation.

Frequency of Contacts.	**Gender.**				**Total.**	
	male		**Female**			
	No	**%**	**No**	**%**	**No.**	**%**
Weekly	-	-	3	8	**3**	**4**
Fortnightly	4	12	9	24	**13**	**19**
Monthly	6	19	15	40	**21**	**30**
Once in three months	12	38	4	11	**16**	**23**
Once in six months	3	9	4	11	**7**	**10**
Once a year	2	6	1	3	**2**	**4**
Not Applicable.	5	16	1	3	**6**	**9**
Total.	**32**	**100**	**37**	**100**	**69**	**100**

It is obvious from the above that female children had more contacts or regular contacts with birth parents than their male counterparts. There was also a relationship between the child's age and the frequency of contact with birth parents. There was a greater frequency of contact between those female children in the younger age group than there was with male children within the same age groups. Boys who were over represented in the older age group had less contact with their parents than their female counterparts. It might have been a factor of the boys' length of stay in placement that the parents were no longer concerned about their safety, or the recognition that the boys were less vulnerable than the girls were and as a result, parents contacted them less frequently.

Parents' places of resident and contact with children.

The other issue was to examine any links between where parents live and how they keep in touch with their children. Parent here refers to any of the birth parents who was identified as having made the placement or who made contact with the child for the period of the placement, but did not include extended family members.

Of the 69 children in the sample, 55 had parents who were living in London. Twelve had parents who were permanently living in Nigeria. Two parents were elsewhere abroad; one in Europe and the other one in America.

Twenty children whose parents were living in London had monthly contacts; thirteen had fortnightly contacts, while 14 had contacts once in three months. Three children all females were having weekly contacts. Only one child among those whose parents lived in London was communicating once in six months. However four children whose parents lived in London at the time of the interviews were not having any forms of contact at all. Of the 12 children whose parents lived in Nigeria, six were communicating once every six months, three had contacts once a year, and two did have contact every three months. Only one child in this group of children whose parents lived in Nigeria did not have any contact at all. Those two children, whose parents lived in Europe and America, one had no contact at all while the other communicated every month by telephone.

The gender cross-tabulation of the frequency of contacts was given in table 6.6.

Parental residence and the nature of contact with their children.

Cross-tabulating the nature of contact with where parents lived, the followings were observed;

i. Twenty-two children whose parents lived in London were visited, and four children whose parents lived in Nigeria were also visited as their means of contact.

ii. Thirteen children whose parents lived in London made contact either by parental visit or through telephone calls. No other children whose parents lived outside London had a combination of visits and telephone calls as form of contact.

iii. Nine children out of the 55 whose parents lived in London were communicating only by telephone. The children whose parents lived in Nigeria and America also used this form of contact.

iv. While nine children went home to their parents at weekends or during school holidays, seven went to parents who lived in London while the other two went home to parents who lived in Nigeria. Even though fewer parents lived in Nigeria, there was a high degree of contact between these parents and their children. Four parents were visiting their children in England; Two children communicated by means of letters and telephones; Two other parents wrote letters to their children as a means of keeping in touch while two children went home on school holidays. No parent among those who lived in London communicated by letter or a combination of letter and telephone.

There was a relationship between where parents lived and the nature and frequency with which they kept in touch with their children. Table 6.7 gives detailed picture of the relationship between where parents lived and the frequency of contacts with their children who were in private fostering placements.

Table 6.7. Parental residence and the frequency of contacts.

Parents' Resident	**Frequency of Contacts.**						**Total**		
								No	**%**
	Weekly	Fortnightly	Monthly	Once in three months	Once In Six Months	Once a Year.	No Contact		
London	3	13	20	14	1	-	4	55	80
Abroad Europe	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1.5
Nigeria.	-	-	-	2	6	3	1	12	17
Abroad other.	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	1.5
Total.	**3**	**13**	**21**	**16**	**7**	**3**	**6**	**69**	**100**

Summary

The figures obtained from the data showed that 44 percent of the children were placed within six months of birth; nearly half of the children (46%) who were placed within 30 months of birth, were girls and 36 percent within the same age group were boys. Girls also made up 54% of the sample of children and were also over represented in the younger age groups. However, more boys tended to stay longer in placements than the girls did even though there were more girls in the sample. More female children were placed much early in age than their male counterparts and by the same measure, had more contacts with their birth parents. The female children were more likely to have direct face to face contacts with parents while the male children were likely to communicate through indirect means; such as by letters and telephone calls. Of the children who had no contacts at all with their parents, five were males and only one female child was in this group.

When we look at the intensity of contacts we can see that all the children who had weekly contacts with parents were females. The same disparities are also reflected in both the fortnightly and monthly contacts where more females than males are shown to dominate. Thus although the male children stay longer in foster care, they however had infrequent contacts with birth parents and when they do, it is likely to be more by indirect means. When we look at the gender cross-tabulation of the nature of contacts (table 6.6), we find that more female children were visited, more received telephone calls from parents and more also went home to parents. Their male counterparts were only represented more in the group of those children who communicated by a combination of parental visits and telephone calls. The overall data showed a situation where the older the child, the less direct personal or face-to-face contact the child had with his/her parents.

The sample taken as a whole showed that the younger a child was, the more likely was the possibility of contact with birth parents. This relationship was significant at the 0.01 level of a 2-tailed Pearson correlation. Overall, the data showed a high degree of contact between children in the sample and their birth parents. It showed that only six cases or nine percent of the children out of 69 did not have contacts with their parents at the time of the interviews. The issues that need looking at are whether these contacts were of significant duration and intensities to benefit the children who were fostered mostly in rural England and away from any settled Black community. These issues and others are the subjects of the next chapter, which looks at the placement characteristics and their implications for the children.

CHAPTER SEVEN.

FOSTERING EXPERIENCES

This Chapter will look at the experience of the foster carers. Section One considers what the triggers were for carers fostering privately; which parties were involved in the decision to foster children, and why carers wanted only West African children. It will also discuss issues of pre-placements preparations. Section two deals with the expectations of foster carers prior to actually fostering, and what carers thought parents wanted them to do. It will also look at what the carers thought their responsibilities to the foster children were. What they (carers) expected to gain from the arrangements and what they thought the children would have gained from being looked after by them. The opinions of foster carers' husbands or male partners will also be discussed in order to understand their roles in private fostering. Their opinions together with those of other members of carers' extended families regarding carers' decisions to foster West African children will also be examined.

Carers' parenting skills and/or styles is also discussed in section Three. It includes discussions on carers' ideas of parenting, what they said they did as foster parents; their knowledge of child development, knowledge of the needs of black children growing up in white households and the age at which carers said they most enjoyed children and would like them to be separated from their birth parents. Issues around punishment, the forms it took and who administered it is also discussed. Finally the section concludes with an examination of how carers regarded the children while they were looking after them. The issue is whether carers regarded and treated the children as their biological children or children who were in the household temporarily and would be prepared for eventual return to their birth parents.

Section Four outlined how carers described their fostering experiences. Their joys and pains, how they ranked these experiences among their life experiences.

The last Sections discussed the children's relationships with their birth families. These deal with issues around the quality of contact and children's awareness or not of their foster status, their feelings and reaction to that status; carers' opinions of the birth parents, and whether carers would contemplate preventing further contacts between children and their birth parents, and in what circumstance. Finally the children's return home either after successful placements or when there were breakdowns were discussed; focusing on birth parents notifying carers of intention to remove, preparing the child and informing the Social Services Department, as well as how carers reacted to or said they would react to the children's return home, in addition to their opinions about post placement contacts between them and the children and their families.

Section One

Motivations:

In doing this research, one was struck by carers' strong commitment to their task; a sense of conviction and dedication that permeated carers' response to the question why they decided to foster through private arrangements.

> " I just wanted to look after children and nobody wanted me to look after their children. It was only the black families that needed someone to look after them; this is why I always look after black children." (Carer had six children of her own).

> "It was a challenge. I used to see them in Longvel very neglected, very often with families who didn't seem to oil their hair or skin or look after them properly. I thought I would make a better job of this. I could love them in a better way and let them know their own culture than what they were doing."
> (Carer had no children of her own)

What emerged from foster carers' responses was their overwhelming desire to nurture children or be close to children and not just to be the foster parents or natural parent substitutes. Fifty three percent of the carers said that they were introduced to private fostering either by their friends or neighbours; 33 percent said they responded to advertisements in either "The Nursery World" magazine or the local papers. Seven percent said because their families had always done it, while the remaining seven percent had initially been local authority foster carers. The following quotes are examples of foster carers' responses to the question "how did it all start?"

> "It started in 1980 when I moved up here and a lot of people were doing it at the time and they were in "The Nursery World"... I thought oh I have got time on my hands. My children quite big then, my daughter was thirteen, my sons were older. I thought I would like to look after one...that was how I got one, it was from a lady who recommended it. That's how I had the first boy."

> "I used to do council fostering before I moved to this area and intended to continue. I wanted to contact Social Services here but then I happened to be at a friend's home that I had just made friends with. She was a foster mother of black children, and obviously she knew my intentions over here to go council fostering. Then one of the parents I met there just asked if I would foster one of her children and that's how it started really, from the parents of one of the children."

"I happened to be living in Leigh Park itself and had lost my own children. I found that I couldn't have children of my own. I had a friend in the same estate not far from where we were living...She had a little coloured baby and I said to her - isn't she gorgeous? She said why don't you do it? I said do what? Where did you get her from? And for the next hour we sat in her lounge and she told me all about private fostering...So I went home and told my husband then - oh I would love to do that.... My first baby I got when he was six weeks old through "The Nursery World"

"My mum and dad did it and I am an only child. So I had all coloured brothers and sisters. So it just comes from one to the other - that sort of thing"

These responses also present the view that most carers in the study were parents who had had their own children and wanted to expand their commitment to parenting children who were deemed as unfortunate and who needed love and care.

Why Black Children?

The question was why foster carers decided to foster only black children given the small number needing placements compared to the number of white children in need of placements if the overwhelming motives were their love of and desire to help less fortunate children? Although there were differences in the responses, the overwhelming majority of responses emphasised altruistic or philanthropic motives. Fostering a black child was seen as doing something useful for the community and also helping the unfortunate children. There were other carers who regarded fostering black children as a novelty; something that would give them status and prestige in the community; to be seen as different from others in the community.

Others on the other hand, fostered through private arrangements because there were less stringent conditions than if they were fostering for the local authority.

As a respondent said: -

"I did start with council fostering, but the thing that bothered me was that they can knock on your door at anytime, night or day and say will you take this child? Sometimes you can end up with the mother as well. That I am afraid doesn't work. That is why I have always loved dark children. I have always got on well with them. We do it for love and not for the money"

The following quotations are typical of either the ease with which carers could get children, how less stringent conditions were and/or the altruistic motives behind what they did when asked 'why Black children'?

> "Mostly because I think the black children needed more love. I think mostly it was that. To stand by them a lot more and to give them a lot more support"

> "Probably because you don't get the same attachment from Social Services' children as you do with the African children. This one I have, she is mine as if I'd given birth to her. But with the Social Services, they come and go and you don't get really attached to them"

> "To put it in a nutshell, I used to think they got a raw deal because they were classed as second class citizens. My girls were eleven and nine when I thought that they didn't need me to do much for them but I still had love to give to others. People ask why I do it and I said because these children get a raw deal. When they are babies people think aren't they beautiful, aren't they sweet, but when they are grown up, they go, oh you black xxxxxxxx and that makes me angry"

Others put their responses in the following contexts: -

> "It was because of the way I had seen people with them - not nice. The little mites were just put into any home. There were an awful lot of children that I know that were with people that weren't looked after. The little mites never moved, they never asked for anything. It's not right. That is solely the reason I did it. Just to look after them properly"

> "We wanted some babies in the home to start with ...We had three healthy children and it seemed an ideal thing to foster and give a home to other children, but I didn't want to it through Social Services with problem children. I wanted to do it where the children would be okay - no problems".

Not withstanding the different responses given, the chief reasons for fostering black children seemed to be carers' need to foster '**Babies**'; children perceived to be less fortunate and in need of help or because they (carers) could be seen to be different in the community

Parties involved: In all cases, the initiative came from the women carers who then put the proposals to either husbands (for married carers) or other members of the family (for other categories of carers). Only in three cases did carers say that the decision was their own alone. These were women who were either divorced or widowed and whose own children had moved out to set up their own homes elsewhere.

In the remaining 27 households, the decision to go ahead finally emerged after members of the family had discussed and agreed on it. Many of the interviewees responded thus: -

> "No, it's something we discussed together. I would never have done it if my husband didn't agree."
>
> "Well, we always talk things over and agree. We all have to agree."

The prime movers in initiating fostering were the wives who then put the need to the whole family for discussion. This prominent role of the wives and what roles the husband or male partners played in private fostering are discussed in latter sections.

PRE -PLACEMENT PREPARATIONS

Notification: Part 1.6 of the Children's Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 8 dealing with private fostering states that "a person who proposes to foster a child by private arrangement and is not yet providing accommodation for that child is required to notify the local authority not less than 6 weeks and not more than 13 weeks before receiving the child." In the event of the child being placed in an emergency the person receiving the child should notify the local authority not more than 48 hours after the fostering arrangement begins.

All foster carers knew that they had a duty or were required by law to notify the Local Authority Social Services when they were entering into private fostering arrangements. However, neither carers nor parents had complied with the six weeks notification requirement or the 48-hour notification in the case of an emergency placement. The practice was that carers would take in a child or children for a trial period to see whether they would settle before informing Social Services. The 48-hours emergency placement requirement was not routinely observed. There was a general lack of knowledge on the part of foster carers regarding this particular aspect of the law.

Although carers knew that they had to notify Social Services Department, they did not know that non-notification could have consequences as to whether they kept the children or not.

Carers acknowledged that when they started many years ago, their houses had been inspected, and they had had police checks, but subsequent placements were not subjected to the same checks.

When asked whether foster carers notify social services before or after the child was placed, the quotes below reflect the general responses of the sample.

> "No, there wasn't any social services when we started fostering. But with these ones you are allowed to keep a child. I think it's two weeks before you register to the social services that you have a child. We have to fill in a form and tell them their names. When they go we just tell them that they have gone" (Respondent had 21 years fostering experience).

> "Well, I tend to wait until the child comes because if I ring them and said so and so child was coming and they didn't come, that would be a problem because the parents don't always come with the children when they say they would So, I tend to wait until the child actually comes. Then I sort out the forms and things" (Respondent had seven years fostering experience).

Foster carers often got phone calls from birth parents that were sometimes desperate to find a place for their children. This they said, did not often give them enough time to notify the SSD. The following responses exemplify this: -

> "I tried to inform them (social services before) but through experience a lot of people they would contact you at the weekend and say well would it be all right if I came on Sunday? But they usually end up coming down and bringing the kids with them"

> "No sometimes we don't get occasions to deal with that. We do get occasions in which children are urgently needing to come in straight away because the mum's gone into hospital or the parents are going to college and they always seem to leave it until the last minute. I've never known any parent who had given us the chance to get to know the child before it moves in" (carer had 20 years experience)

> "It depends on the parents as well. They can ring up and say - we need someone, have you got room? And of course you can't very well turn round and say I am going to wait for forty-eight hours. If we didn't have a child and someone through the grapevine said - we are desperate here, we have got a child, can you look after them...some of these social people we have heard about, you must give them six weeks notice. Well you can't always do that. Up here we don't. If they say I've got to back to Nigeria and I have a son who is eight months old and I can't go with him. If I have room we say come down" (Respondent with 28 years experience)

It thus showed that foster carers knew that they had to notify the social services before the children arrived, but did not always do so. Birth parents' desperate needs to place their children did not give foster carers time to observe the legal requirements to notify. Children were thus placed and would be in placements for sometime before Social Services were informed.

There were also no pre-placement assessments of the carers' suitability after the initial assessment when foster carers started their fostering career. This was supported by carers' responses that they informed the SSD only when the child was in placement. The following quotes give a pointer to carers' responses regarding pre-placement assessments and form filling: -

> "Before they arrived you are supposed to but I am afraid I have taken them and then I have rung them and told them. They do know the genuine ones...they will say don't worry we know that they are there. We do have a lot of forms that we have to fill in and send off."

> "Not always, no. But you are supposed to tell the social worker. But I know that she would ring me so I don't tell her until she rings and I will say - oh, by the way two have gone back and another two have arrived... but she does say to me why didn't you tell me on time?"

Meeting the child. Given the way birth parents usually approach carers regarding their need to foster their children, it was no surprise then that over 80 percent of the foster carers in the sample did not meet with the children prior to the children's reception into the various households. Seventeen percent said that they met their foster children prior to reception. This was either because they were already fostering the children's elder siblings or had done so in the past or parents had also given them notice even before the children were born. These were the exceptions to the general practice in all areas where the samples were drawn. Children were seldom prepared for gradual introduction to their foster carers (in a sort of "getting to know you" way) or their homes.

It made no difference whether the carer came by the child through advertisements in "The Nursery World" or through direct telephone calls from the birth parents. Responses as

those given below were common to the sample regarding meeting the child prior to placements: -

> "No. She got on the bus from London and I met her in the town centre. The mother actually stayed the evening until the next day and that was it, she went."

> "I never met the child before, but twenty minutes after I met them, the mother was gone. And I thought if that was my child I would want to know a lot about the person that was going to be looking after them than just to dump the child…She said I will come and see you in a week. The week became four weeks and she finally came and said - is it all right? And I said - yes."

Information about the children: Children were placed with little preparation and the carers knew little about them. Carers said that they were told the children's names, whether African or English. Other than names, parents did not always volunteer much useful information, which carers said they wanted. All carers said they would always want information about a child's medical history, allergies, habits, who had looked after the child in the past, skin and hair care and whether there were any religious practices that they needed to know about. The following responses were typical of the practice in all the areas included in this study: -

> "Well, they don't give you a lot of information. You have got to ask for the information. I had to ask if all the inoculations were in order. Had they any illnesses or anything/ Most of the time it is no, but you find in the course of time that they have one thing or another. When you confront the parents - oh yes, I forgot to tell you about that"

> "Nothing at all. None of them told me anything of any great consequence"

Others said:

> "To be quite honest some of them don't give me any information at all. Like Yeni, we found out that she was allergic to penicillin after we had her for a week and we didn't know that from the start. Don suffers from bad ears regularly but we didn't know. So we don't really get a lot unless we push for the information"

However, when parents wanted foster carers to observe certain religious practices they did insist that carers should follow what was requested.

The response below represented one account of what is said here;

> "The parents don't tell you a lot but you see this little girl - her parents are Celestial and they used to come once a month to show me how to bath her with a candle with twine or something round it and I used to have to put this in her bath water once a month. I don't know what the significance of it was. It was never explained but I used to just follow the procedure since they insisted. The same at bedtime. She always wore white satin and a blue sash. I had to lay it on the pillow. But other than that no more such information".

The prevailing practice in most cases was that parents only volunteered little information about the children to the foster carers. Even though Part 1.4: Section 12. Of the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 8, states that 'as much information as possible about the child and his needs should be shared by the parents with the prospective carers before placement so that they can measure the task they propose to take on'. On the evidence available one can only speculate that birth parents in their desperate search for foster carers, were never fully aware of the laws and regulations guiding such arrangements. Or if they were, they never showed any enthusiasm to comply with these.

SECTION TWO.

ROLE EXPECTATIONS:

This section will examine issues relating to foster carers' expectations about what they were going to do when they made the decisions to look after other people's children. These include what they thought parents wanted them to do for the children; what duties or responsibilities carers thought they had toward the children? What the carers expected to gain from the arrangement and what benefits they expected the children to gain from being looked after.

The section will also looks at what the husbands or male partners of carers thought their roles were in the arrangement. The perceptions of the local community of white families bringing up black children are also examined. Part 1.4.8 of the Guidance and Regulations to the Children's Act 1988 states that "the purpose and intended duration of fostering arrangements should be established clearly prior to the placement". This provision although not stated explicitly, appears to include agreements on the role parents expects carers to play.

This issue was approached from the perspective of what carers thought birth parents wanted them to do when they were asked to look after the children, and what the parents were doing at the time. If the parents were studying, carers perceived their roles as taking over parental roles until parents were ready to resume those roles. Thus giving birth parents time and space to concentrate on their studies; and taking over parental roles meant bringing the child up as carers would bring up their own children or as they knew best.

These perceptions were exemplified by their responses typified by the following quotes: -

"Just take it and bring it up until they are ready to have it back, I think"

"I just assumed that they want you to look after them like you would your own. Give them a home, love them and care for them. It is very hard to love them and give them back but that's what you've got to have at the back of your mind. You have to do everything to these children that their parents would do - in fact more - because you've got to substitute their parents and you've got to remember that you're going to give them back. That is hard"
(Respondent in her 40's married with 3 or her own children)

"Well, probably to give it love and take it out and all that sort of thing. Some people said to me how could they give their babies to be fostered? But you've got to understand that it's the culture. They come over to our country and train to be nurses, doctors, solicitors or whatever. So when they're studying I fell they have got to foster them out. Baby minding comes a little bit hard because that's when they do their studies at night. If they have got their children fostered then they can do their studies at night"

While over 70 percent of the carers saw their roles as bringing up the children as they would bring their own children and because the parents could not perform these roles, other carers saw their roles as fulfilling some other parental objectives. A small minority of carers (15%) thought that parents wanted their children to have English upbringing or (for those children brought directly from West Africa), to have better education and better health care.

These perceptions were demonstrated by the following responses: -

"It is the English upbringing isn't it, and the education mainly. They get a good education. The medical system must be better. I think that is about it. This is what comes across"

"Well, a lot of them nowadays like them to have an English upbringing because they say if we are staying in this country and the children are going to school they need to know how English people behave but on the other hand they want them to have respect and discipline which a lot of English children haven't got...The word they normally use is 'here is your baby, you love it as you would your own and care for it and bring it up with respect and discipline' "

These tendencies of West African parents to supposedly give away their children to strangers have often been confusing to carers who used to think that parents had given away the children to them forever. These were portrayed by some carers' responses to the question, what they thought parents wanted them to do when they placed their children?

"Shade is ll. Years old now and the parents still say to me that she is your daughter because she is in your house. They also said Tony is your son and I tried to do my best for them as the family would expect me to do"

This respondent was confused by parents' use of the expressions "your son" or "your daughter" to refer to their own children who were being looked after in the home.

> "Well I know now, I used to think well they don't want the child and they have given me the child to look after for the rest of its life. But I learnt through my mistakes. It broke my heart - never again and realised after talking to them that that was the custom and that it was just a question of looking after them until such a time as the parents were ready to have them back. I usually find that if there is a man involved the child will go back when they are two or three but if it is a single mum they are quite happy to let you have it long term" (Respondent aged 72 years and had 27 years experience)

This lack of clear ideas about what parents wanted foster carers to do other than just look after their children has remained one of the grey areas that have baffled professionals in this area of childcare.

Duties to the child. Playing the role of the parents thus entails some responsibilities to the child as well. The carers were asked about what they thought their duties and responsibilities to the children were. The main response to the question was "Love" and "care". Forty seven percent of the carers said that their duties to their foster children were to give them love and affection. Their parental duties were therefore geared toward fulfilling this. Their responses to the question were conveyed in the following quotes: -

> "Love, caring for them, give them love and care. It is rewarding. When they come in some of them are pitiful. Then the next time you see them they are full of life and joy and dancing around"
> (Respondent with 12 years experience)

> "Love is the main thing, and to teach them what's right and wrong. I just hope that they grow up to be a credit to me for bringing them up and to their own mothers. I hope to say that I have given them a good start"

> Others thought that their duties were to give the children good upbringing. The provision of a good upbringing was perceived by 27 percent of the sample as their major responsibility, in addition to good grounding as citizens who would be expected to function adequately in society

There were others who perceived their duties in terms of providing physical care for the children until their parents could take them back.

A small minority (6%) thought their duties were to provide support to the children in enabling them to know about whom they were, where they came from, and information about their culture. These carers phrased their answers as:

> "What my duty to the foster child is to be there for them always, to help them understand their own culture within the best of my knowledge and ability. To support them and to be there for them always, help them to grown up"(Respondent was over 50 years old and with 17 years experience).

> "Care, Supper, listen to their problems and answer any questions that they want to know. If they want to know something about their cultural background I tell them as much as I can on that and make it into a story" (Respondent in her 50s with 28 years experience)

It can thus be summed up that the predominant perceptions of foster carers regarding their duties and responsibilities to their private foster children were to provide love, affection and good upbringing, ideals which families in modern times aim to attained or provide for their children. Foster carers thus saw their duties as nurturing their foster children by the provision of conducive family atmosphere that would enable the children to develop and grow as normal functioning members of the English society. How these expectations and role perception accorded with those of the children's' parents, we would not know since there were no data to enable a comparison to be made between what carers thought their duties and responsibilities were and what parental objectives were in the fostering arrangements in the first place.

EXPECTED BENEFITS:

The decision to foster another person's child through private arrangement was explained by several carers in chapter five and at the beginning of this chapter. These were given as their reasons or motivations. The main motivations were: -

(i) Love and fondness for babies;

(ii) Helping unfortunate children

(iii) The need to nurture a child

(iv) Have large families

However, these do not indicate what foster carers hoped to gain from fostering and what benefits would accrue to the children from being fostered in carers' households?

i Carers' Expected Benefits- Foster carers' responses to this question were spread across four main themes. Those who said they expected to gain love and affection from the children (37%), those who said that they expected to gain a sense of achievement or satisfaction from bringing up other peoples' children (20%); Another 20 percent said that the joy and pleasure of having children around them was their expected benefit. Finally another 20 percent responded that the experiences of looking after children from other cultures were benefits enough. One carer however said that the benefit was in the joy of watching the children grow up. Although a sense of dedication and deep feelings permeated their responses, important differences emerged among foster parents with regards to what benefits they expected from or have actually gained from their fostering experiences. These were demonstrated by the varieties of responses they gave to the question as can be read from the following quotes: -

> "Their love and affection, it wasn't that because they are black or white. Their lives is just different to ours."

> "Well a lot of love because I couldn't have any of my own around. Mine were grown up."

> "I suppose I am always interested in how other people live, especially other countries. I thought, well I can learn a lot like that. It was just for another experiences really. To get to know the parents and what they were like…They are obviously different to us - through things they eat…Especially listening to what some of their customs are. I have found it very interesting over the years."

> "You get a very great sense of achievement because they come here and they are quiet, hardly say a word and by the time they go back they can hardly stop talking…When these ones go back, the people in their block say "what has she done to them? It's brilliant what you do for our kids"

Although the responses quoted tend to individualise carers' stated benefits; these were however the stated primary benefits even though there were some overlaps in the benefits that foster carers said they expected from fostering.

There were overlaps in such areas as those who expected love and affection and also the satisfaction of bringing up other people's children; the benefit of social acceptability in the community for bringing up children from other cultures and a sense of being able to rescue less fortunate children. A woman in her mid fifties, widowed and had five children of her own expressed her benefit in personal terms. The presence of a young dependent child provided her the satisfaction of knowing that someone was dependent on her and she could use the situation, as she wanted. Her words were: -

> "I just did it because I wanted a baby around me at all time. I've always all my life had young babies around me…I just had this thing about babies. I don't know. I suppose I always wanted a little one to love, especially once my children grew up and I felt redundant, nobody needed me. I need someone to need me and be dependent on me. That's the sort of person I am. I am really doing it because I suppose I am selfish. I'm doing it for myself as much as for the child, because I need that baby. I need that little one to be dependent on me, to lavish all my time and attention and love on. I need somebody rather than an adult."

Although this respondent was able to articulate her rewards in these clear terms, others who said that the benefits to them were the joy of having children in the homes could also be classed in the same frame of analysis. The presence of the children gave these carers the satisfaction that they have made a difference in the lives of other unfortunate children. Other respondents as typified by the followings echoed these perceptions: -

> "When my husband was alive, we knew that we could give them a good home away from their parents while they were at college. We knew we could make them happy here. Just the different lives that we have to give them here"

> "I just love children so much and you get a lot from a child especially when they have been pushed around from pillar to post. These little children need love that's all I feel. You are helping the child. I do it for the child's sake."

Or the one who said:

> "Just the satisfaction that I got three children that are going to be happy. Its just the satisfaction that they are three children that I am going to really love and care for and one day they are going to go back and their parents are going to be proud of how I have brought them up, well I hope so anyway"

ii Expected benefits to children- The question asked was 'what gains did foster carers think would have accrued to the children from being fostered by them'? The responses fell into two distinct categories. Sixty percent said that they thought that the children would benefit from good upbringing and having some form of stability in the

lives; and 40 percent said that the benefits to the children would be in their acquisition of the English way of life and culture. These perceptions of what gains would accrue to the children tied in with the rescue mission perspective or the philanthropic motives of foster carers and the notion of parents desiring better start for their children.

The motivation to do good or rescue unfortunate children had its fulfilment in the success with which carers thought they achieved through the provision of good upbringing, instilling good English values and/or culture in these children. The perceptions that birth parents wanted carers to bring the children up as they would their own had its fulfilment in carers' attempts to bring the children up the best way they knew - the English way. This they did through devoting a lot of resources for looking after the children. Some carers said that the imprecise nature of the agreements regarding the purposes and duration of placements had caused some confusion in their perceptions of what parents wanted them to do when the children were initially placed. So when carers were asked about what they thought were the benefits to the children from being brought up in their homes, typical of those who said 'good upbringing and stability' were responses like: -

> "A good start in life definitely. A very good basis for life…we are their parents for the education".
>
> "Love and a good start in life. I always give them a nice start I hope and they have all been very healthy".
>
> "Well to give them a home and love and as they grow try and sort of help them with getting to learn things. Teach them right from wrong.

The perceived needs of the children to acquire the English way of life were typified by the following: -

> "Hopefully understanding a bit of the English way of life but as it turns out they are more English than they are Nigerian, which is a common thing really in an English family. It is obvious that if their parents don't take them very often, they are in an English way of life aren't they?".

> "I think they have gained a lot here. They have learnt a lot of a different way of life; completely different to the one they have with their own parents. Because my girls say I wish we were back here forever. This is because they have no life up there. They are just sitting round at home. There is nowhere for them to play, not like here"

Or the response of the respondent who said:

> "Oh they should gain politeness, manners, security, love but also I hope that they get a good education. This is what I do for my children here. Give them a good education as well"

OPINIONS OF HUSBANDS/MALE PARTNERS.

Male respondents were available during the interviews in half the sample (i.e. 15 interviews). The questions asked were those regarding their opinions, what they thought their roles were, and what they said they actually did in the fostering situations. Only their opinions are dealt with in this section while the rest of the other aspects dealing with the actual things they said they did are dealt with in Chapter eight under Support Networks.

While all those who answered the questions about their opinions said they did not mind their wives or partners fostering, some of them said that they initially had some reservations regarding taking other people's children into their homes. These could be grouped into three categories: -

i. Fears about what they were getting themselves into;

ii Not to take in handicapped or disabled children;

iii The effects of the children going back to their parents on the wives or partners.

Some of these were expressed in the following ways: -

> "I had no opposition, but one of my worries was how she would react when they went home"

> "Mixed really. I didn't know what she was going to get into. I didn't realise what the family attitude would be. We thought we would give it a try for three or four months. Everything went fine"

> "I didn't mind. It made no difference to me. The only children I did draw a line were handicapped children. We couldn't cope with them. We were asked to take a Downs Syndrome child, we never did take him in the end. They wanted someone to take him until he was eighteen and we weren't prepared for it".

The very strong opinions in favour of private fostering by the foster fathers might have been because of the discussions, which took place within the families before the wives, or partners went ahead to start fostering. Thus it seemed that whatever opinions

husbands or male partners had against private fostering would have been expressed, discussed and agreed before accepting the children and once carers took in one child, many more followed.

However, from the few quoted instances above, it appeared that pleasing their wives or partners rather than satisfying pressing paternal needs, was an important element in the decisions of these men to become foster fathers. Indicators to these were demonstrated in expressions such as: -

> "Well, whatever makes her happy"
>
> "Sometimes I think oh when are we going to have the house to ourselves. Probably not; But I won't do anything to stop her doing it".
>
> "I moan sometimes. I say we are getting old for this and need to have a life of our own. I don't mean it directly to the children"

REACTIONS OF OTHER PEOPLE.

i The extended families. There was a 100 percent positive response from foster carers that members of their families (immediate and extended) were in favour of them fostering black children. For those carers who started much earlier during their child bearing years all their own children have grown up together with some of the foster children and have all come to regard and treat one another as siblings. Carers' parents regarded and treated the foster children as grandchildren. The foster carers showed that the children were part of the family and treated them that way. Moreover all carers and members of their families referred to the children as theirs. The following quotes were typical of all responses from foster carers: -

> "Well my children were all brought up with coloured children. We have an adopted daughter who is forty-one now. We had her when she was three weeks. They just grew up with them and accepted them".
>
> "They love them. They have never treated them any different. They have all had exactly the same, all of them. The first time Noel came it was on Boxing Day and there were Christmas presents waiting for him even before they met him. They wanted to make him feel at home".

For others, who already had experiences of having people of other races and cultures in their families the presence of black children in the family did not excite much concern. One respondent said:-

> "They are fine because we have always had black people in our family. You see because my husband's people were dark anyway. He was Indian so there hasn't been any problems really"

The general response was that the foster children were treated as members of the carers' families. The perception of being part of the family was explicitly expressed sometimes by carers, as exemplified by the following quotes: -

> "No they love them to bits. They treat them like their own niece and nephews"

> "I come from a large family, there are eight of us and they are all brilliant - even my parents. They are both gone now but my mum, Muda was the apple of her eye. She idolised him".

> "Well, they are brothers and sisters. They are all my children. Big sister. She always calls herself big sister"

ii Local perceptions and reactions- Foster carers' responses to how the local communities had reacted to their fostering black children in the neighbourhood were on the whole positive. Fifty seven percent of the carers said that there have only been positive reactions from either neighbours or the local communities. Twenty three percent said that they had mixed reactions. By this it meant that people in the neighbourhood had initially shown negative attitudes toward carers but had changed their attitudes after many years. Twenty percent said that they were still experiencing negative attitudes from neighbours or people within the localities. Indicators of positive reactions were expressions such as: -

> "They praise me. I knew a lot of people who stop me and say the children are growing up lovely and say to me, you must love them and I say of course I do. We don't have a child and not think anything of the child. You do love them, you give them everything you've got".

> "They think I'm great to carry on at my age. When I go to the clinic they say oh Rosa you are a diamond, what are you waiting for? Your gold watch for your retirement".

Carers who said that they had mixed reactions said that the problems were at the initial stage when they moved into the area or when they started fostering. Others said that the problems were with other kids in the schools and not the neighbours. These were put in the following ways: -

> "When we first moved here, we didn't know what the neighbours would think. But now and then you get the odd ones. Like he had a few problems at school where the kids called him Blackie and kids can be very hateful and spiteful. I had a talk with him and said that he took no notice of them, that he was as good as they are".

> "Well we are very lucky in this town. But I've had two people that stand out in my mind. This man walked up to the pram and went 'huh' and then walked away as if to say why has she got this coloured child here. I think he was an old colonel from way back. A very elderly man. The other was an elderly lady who had lived in Kenya and had black servants. She didn't like the children because she thought their places were as servants. I disagreed with her".

One respondent thought that the majority of people were fine but went on to say that: -

"The majority say - oh we take our hats off to you. I have had some incidents where I have been called a 'Nigger Lover'. I've been spat at walking through the town centre. I mean this was way back in the early days when there were only three families that actually had black children. But as time has gone, we have got black families now living in this town. I think Nick only got one racial abuse when he was in junior school"

Carers who said that they had experienced negative attitudes described incidents where people had either been rude to them or had made some unpleasant comments directed at them. These only happened when they had their foster children with them. Some of these incidents were described in the following terms: -

> "Some people are quite rude. As I always tried to explain to them, not every black person comes from the same country. The worst experience I ever had was with my neighbour who claimed to be a Christian. I had this child but I never came across her until the summer in the shopping centre... I was walking up to Sainsburys and the pram cover was half way down and she said - oh you have a baby and I said yes, she turned round, saw it and whoosh she was gone. I did catch up with her one day in the church and told her that her attitude was disgusting".

> "I don't know. I have had some racism. But I don't care about what they think. These are children, you forget their colour".

> "When we first had him people used to stare and I used to get really queer. If someone looked at me in the street and they would come and say something like, oh goodness he's black, and I would say, yes and you are white."

Whether foster carers interpreted people's attitudes as positive or negative depended on how strongly they felt about peoples' opinions and how those opinions or attitudes affected the children. From the various responses to the questions, it could be assumed that foster carers experienced negative reactions initially when they started or just moved into the area. At the time of the interviews for the research, 57 percent of the carers described people's attitudes toward them as positive.

SECTION THREE

PARENTING STYLES:

The main themes of this section will centre on what foster carers said they did by way of parenting; how they did it; the aims of what they did; and the implications of these approaches. This also includes foster carers' knowledge of child development. Especially whether they approached their parental tasks with a good knowledge and recognising individual needs and developmental stages in each child as well as the needs of Black children growing up in White households, isolated from settled black populations?

Punishment which included the forms, and who administered them is also discussed.

Finally the section concludes with how the carers regarded their foster children, how they thought the children had settled in the foster families, and the implications of the findings to the children's future return to their families of origin.

i. Parenting: The protection, nurture, and education of children by adults are fundamental to human life. These tasks are usually seen as the primary responsibility of the biological parents or adults acting in loco parentis. This central task of overseeing the physical, intellectual, and emotional development of the child into adulthood is what is generally meant by the term "parenting" (Fantini and Russo 1980). The experience is neither simple nor predominantly natural since the requirements for acceptance as an adult are not the same in all societies. In the context of the diversities of cultures in the United Kingdom today, there are great variations to be expected in parental expectations for children and goals of child rearing.

How did foster carers go about fulfilling these roles? What did they say they understood, was expected of them by way of parenting?

Foster carers defined what they did in relation to what they thought birth parents wanted them to do. While these carers saw their duties as parents in terms of being there for the child and caring; others saw parenting Black children as no different from parenting White children. Having brought up their own children successfully, the experience thus provided the yardstick on how to bring up the foster children as well.

Two respondents who had brought up five children of her own each said:

> "Well, what I've always did with my own children. Washing, cleaning, and taking them out to play. It is important that they feel secure in the home. I've always done it with all my own children."

> "Everything that you do for your own. You take on full responsibility for them. Feeding, clothing, their schooling. You've to learn to love them because you have a baby of your own. That's the difficult bit ... just everything that you do with your own family. Just an extension of that really." (Respondent had three children of her own).

It appeared that these foster carers saw the main goals of parenting in terms of the provision of physical care (food, shelter, clothing, and health). However, other carers defined parenting in terms of providing the support and guidance to enable the child to go through life. This was clearly expressed by a respondent who said:-

> "We show them the right way to go. We are always there for them whenever they need us."

Parenting was thus directed towards the provision of love and care (47%), giving the children good upbringing (27%), physical care (20%), and support (6%). These views were also dependent on carers' sets of values and also on what they thought parents wanted them to do. These interplay between role expectations, parental goals and carers' values thus determined their parenting styles or goals.

ii. Knowledge of child development:

By child development here it means the process by which a child grows and changes through its life span and the wider social context within which this happens.

Did foster carers bringing up Black children in the study see any difference in the way children develop whether they were Black or White and how knowledgeable were the foster carers about differences in the way children develop? Foster carers were asked whether they thought that "all children develop the same way no matter their racial or cultural backgrounds. Fifty-seven percent did not agree with this. The foster carers in this group did not think that even twins develop in the same way even less children who are either ethnically or culturally different. Other carers saw differences in the ways children develop in terms of physical growth or the way the children express themselves emotionally.

> "No, I don't think even two sisters or two brothers or a brother and a sister, can develop the same. They might do the same things at a certain time but it is just coincidence. I don't think any two people can develop the same."

> "No, they are all different. They all have their own characters, their own ways, and their own personalities. People say that if you take a Nigerian child and take it into a White family, they lose their identity. It's not true, they don't lose their identity. Oh, I don't think so."

On the other hand, 43 per cent of the sample thought all children develop the same way whether Black or White. Not acknowledging individual difference, these foster carers justified their perceptions with expressions such as "We are all God's children underneath", "All the difference is the colour of the skin which is nothing because all inside the body is the same". For example some of them said: -

> "All the differences is the colour of the skin which is nothing. The blood is the same, the palm of the hand and the feet are the same. It's just that you are Black. There is no difference between a Black child and a White one."

> "Yes, I think they all develop the same way, Black, White, Chinese or any colour. I would personally most probably think so. No matter what colour. Absolutely."

These respondents either did not understand the question or they actually believed that all children would follow the same or similar developmental paths. This perception led to a somewhat "colour-blind" approach to the nurturing of their foster children.

Some other carers thought that whether any differences were noticed, depended on the caregiver. One respondent said:

> "Whatever background they come from, if they come into your home, you can teach them your ways and how you want them to develop. All my parents have been grateful how I have looked after their children. I've had very good reports."

Some of the carers who saw no differences in the ways children develop, approached their childrearing roles denying differences in individual children. It appeared that acknowledging differences in the way children develop, would highlight the cultural and ethnic differences between carers and the children, which were already apparent in skin colour and by so doing, would be putting impediments to how they (carers) bonded with the children.

Acknowledging differences in children to this group of carers, would appear to also mean acknowledging colour or racial differences, which might be a basis for meeting cultural and and/or racial needs. It would mean treating the child differently and acknowledging his/her needs for culturally appropriate stimulation, which the carers were not equipped to provide. But did foster carers think there were special needs of a Black child growing up in a White household?

iii. Knowledge of the needs of black children: Parenting as portrayed in this study, represents not only the processions of a society's concern for its children, but also the concern for its future. Children must be cared for and be given access to the information about their future lives as adults so that they may take their place in the community. Given the differences that exist between West African and White English families, there would be differences expected in the needs of children.

The overwhelming majority of foster carers (87%) were indeed of the view that the overriding need was for children to know about their cultures and to keep in touch with those cultures and backgrounds. Most of the carers were very emphatic about the need for

the children to know about their cultures, who their parents were, and to grow up having positive attitudes about themselves. These perceptions were variously expressed for example: -

> "Well, they have to know who they are, about their background. There are so many mistakes little Black children make if they grow up in a White family without knowing. I find that those children who know nothing tend to think, why can't I change the colour of my skin, why am I this colour and you are not? Can I paint myself or can I scrub myself. I have seen it happen."

> "Well, I think that they must be aware of their colour and their culture. You must teach them about these as much as you can, as much as you know. I've had encyclopaedias and read all about these countries and tried to tell them. I remember Kwasu, he didn't ever want to go to Ghana, and he was ten, he thought he was like Tarzan. Swinging through trees. So I got the encyclopaedia out with pictures and showed him the modern Ghana. So I think that it's very important to tell them about their own culture and community - and I hope that the parents do that as well."

> "They do need to know that they are a different colour from us and they should be proud of that. They need to know as much as you can find out about their own culture for when they go back to their roots, whether that is London or back to their country."

All these quotes reflected not only what foster carers thought their foster children needed to enable them to become part of their communities and cultures, but also some of the things foster carers did to ensure that the children achieved them. However a minority of foster carers(13%) who followed the colour-blind approach, justified their answers in terms of the wider role(s) in which the child was expected to function in the future. These carers emphasised that it was more important to instil a sense of worth or pride in the child rather than emphasise issues around their skin colours or culture. These carers appeared to advocate a generalised or universal approach to the notion of the needs of Black children. Such perceptions were conveyed in responses such as:

> "I don't sort of see it that they need anything in that way. Because I personally don't like making an issue of Black and White. The children are just children. If they are here we try and treat them as ours. If we go out, we go out with just children. They are not Black, they are not White. To me they are just children. I've never really seen colour or skin as a problem."

Or the respondent who said:

> "Teach them that they are as good as anybody else and that they are not second to that White child ... So underneath the skin - I've always taught my children that if they come home and said "Oh, so and so's picking on me saying that I am Black this and Black that", I always say ignore them. Go back and say I'm as White as you under my skin, mind your business. I was born White, unfortunately my skin turned brown."

> "It's up to the parents really isn't it. I mean that if they want their children to be brought up with a White family it's for them to say. You don't just go along to them and say "I would like to look after your child", you know. They have to ask you, you know what I mean?"

In the main, almost all foster carers were united in the opinion that the placement needs of the Black child in White foster families, were to know about their culture and family backgrounds. Foster carers also supported the need for the children to have contact with their parents or people of the same colour or environments in order to support the children's development of a feeling of worth.

iv. Punishments: Bringing up children also involves showing them the dos and don'ts of society, and involves control by way of rewards and punishments. Various studies have been made of how parents may vary in their styles of childrearing.(Baumrind, 1967, 1980 Maccoby and Martin, 1980 and Steinberg et al 1992/1993). While some parents believe in strong discipline, others do not. Maccoby and Martin (1980) separated two dimensions of parenting styles- how demanding or undemanding parents are about their children' behaviour, on the one hand, and how responsive or unresponsive they are to their children on the other. A four-fold classification was thus produced.

	Responsive	**Unresponsive.**
Demanding	Authoritative	Authoritarian
Undemanding	Permissive	Uninvolved

Traditionally in West Africa, a child could be corrected or disciplined by any adult if he/she misbehaves. In disciplining children, parents did, and still use physical measures, but this is usually done with care and not with a view to inflicting injuries on the child. Thus the West African parents' styles would correspond to the demanding authoritarian

and uninvolved model. The forms and ways in which parents punish their children are also a product of societal values on how children are viewed and treated. That being the case, how did foster carers react to their foster children who became naughty? who administered or enforced discipline, and did they use physical measures?

When asked who administered punishment in the home, 73 per cent of the women foster carers said that they alone did. This seemed unusual and contrary to tradition where the fathers administer punishment or enforce discipline in the family when children do something wrong and need to be punished. Only in 27 per cent of the households were punishments administered by both husband and wife. In no household was the man or husband the only enforcer of discipline.

When the forms, which the corrections or punishments took, were looked at, in 73 per cent of responses, punishments also include some forms of physical measures. Twenty-seven per cent said that they never use physical punishments at all. However, when asked about the forms of punishment they used regularly carers reported various forms of punishments. Thirty-seven per cent said they "ground" their children or deny them certain privileges; 13 per cent said they send the children off to their rooms, depending on their ages. Ten per cent said that they usually tell the children off, while 13 per cent said that "smacking" was the only form of punishment.

In the 73 per cent of cases where physical measures were sometimes used, foster carers said that it had to be something very serious to make them use physical punishment. When asked "under what circumstances they would usually smack the child?" some of their responses were:

> "If they was in danger, like playing near electric plugs. If I tell them once and they don't take any notice, and I explain what is happening, I would have their hand. But I feel that is for their own safety and not a corporal punishment."

> "Something very naughty. Pulling wallpaper off the wall, drawing on the wall, especially when you have said "no". I let it go with a couple of warnings and then I will smack."

> "Well I suppose with a three-year old if they are absolutely out of control, going mental, and screaming and hitting you and that sort of thing, you would give them a smack to calm them down."

Most foster carers said that the physical punishment used was slight compared to how birth parents wanted them to punish the children. Birth parents were known to tell the carers to 'Beat' the children using a cane or belt when necessary. Thus foster carers' approach to punishment would resemble the undemanding, permissive, and authoritative style.

The difference in discipline between West African parents and English foster parents is in the use of physical punishment emphasised by birth parents and the use of "time out", "grounding", and a host of other techniques employed by carers, which avoided physical punishment. Physical punishment which is generally frown at or against the law in the UK was not the commonly used form of punishment even though birth parents wanted carers to use this form of punishment for wrong doings. Carers resisted this and their concerns were portrayed in the following quotes:-

> "Mum told me that they should stand in the corner of the room with their hands up in the air. I don't believe in that sort of punishment."

> "I don't like the beating their dad used to do to them when he came from London. Because when they used to come they used to smack them. Told me to beat them at age of three. Beat them because I've seen them do it. Terrible. I would punish them - not let them have pocket money but not use belt or a cane."

It is not hard to see the kind of problems these different approaches may cause for the children when they return home. These contradictions had implications for both the emotional and physical well being of the children in addition to the confusion it can cause the children about what were appropriate forms of behaviour. In the absence of any data to measure how this situation has been resolved, it can only be suggested that parents and foster carers need to dialogues at the beginning of placements to avoid disagreements over approaches to punishment. It also highlights the complexities of the private fostering situation (an issue discussed in the final chapter).

v. How foster carers regarded the children:

> "It is expected that the purpose and duration of all placements need to be clearly stated from the onset, and should be reviewed on every visit the social worker makes to the family" (Regulation 1.4.8).

The absence of any detailed and enforceable agreement about the purpose and duration of placements, coupled with foster carers' perception of what their roles were, meant that many of the carers went about their tasks, having varying views and perception of the children. All foster carers said that they regarded the children as part of their biological kin; an extension of their family. Those carers who were fifty years and above (70%) said that they looked upon their foster children as their grandchildren and treated them like they would their own grandchildren. Those within the childbearing ages said they regarded the children, and treated them as their own biological children. When asked "how they regarded their foster children, typical responses were:

> "As ours. I always say to their parents when they leave the children with us to let us treat them as our children while they are in our home, because I can't treat them different to mine. You have got to treat it as one of your own to make it feel wanted and want to live here. So they have to be as part of our family."

> "Just as part of the family. They are mine, and that's it. regard them as my daughters and sons, they are not my foster children. They are my daughters."

Typical of those who regarded the children as their grandchildren were responses such as:

> "I look at them like my own. There is no difference, they are treated the same as my grandchildren. If you noticed I looked at you when you said "foster carer", I don't see myself as a foster carer. I see myself as a foster mother definitely." (Respondent age 72).
>
> "As my grandchildren more than anything." (Respondent age 51).

These tendencies of carers to regard the children as their own sometimes became a problem especially around parental visits and when carers failed to gain legal custody of children. However some carers agonised over parental visits as these reminded them that the children were not their own. As one carer said:

> "I suppose I treat them like mine. Sometimes, yes, I think it is very difficult not to. It is when the parents visit and you kind of think "Oh, they are not my children."

> "He is mine. I've had him nine years before I went for adoption but they said it was going to be hard and that he could be taken away. I cracked. It cracked me up. I said I would do a runner. I would have run away if I'd thought that they were going to take him away. I really would. But he is here now."

What have emerged with regard to how foster carers regarded their foster children were the following:-

a). Foster carers regard their foster children, as if these were their own children or grandchildren.

b). Many of them actually hoped that the children were there for good, as portrayed by responses such as "I wouldn't mind if they didn't go back.".

c). Foster carers faced the dilemma of committing themselves to looking after other people's children for long periods and getting bonded with them, and constantly reminding themselves that these were other peoples' children who would eventually return to their parents.

d). The way foster carers went about their tasks tended to give the impression that they saw these placements as a kind of adoption. At least from the ways they tried to assimilate these children as part of their own families sent these messages.

Thus the notion of bringing the children up as they would their own children, which carers said were their perception of birth parents' objectives. The implications of this approach by foster carers are discussed in relation to their reactions to the children's return home.

SECTION FOUR

1. DESCRIPTION OF EXPERIENCES:

Having looked after West African children for many years, how would foster carers describe their experiences, where would these rank in the hierarchy of their life experiences, and/or things that have given them much fulfilment in life?

The data showed that 53 per cent of the carers described their private fostering experiences as "Wonderful", "Very enjoyable", or "Very good". Thirty seven per cent described their own experiences as "Good", or "All right". Seven per cent said it was neither "Good nor bad", while one person described it as "Bad".

Table. 7.1 How Foster carers described their fostering experiences.

Wonderful		Good		Not good or bad		Bad		Very bad		Total	
No	**%**	**No**	**%**	**No**	**%**	**No**	**%**	**No**	**%**	**No**	**%**
16	53	11	37	2	7	1	3	-	-	30	100

A majority of the respondents described their experiences as "Wonderful" and ninety per cent of the carers have had positive experiences.

When asked to describe their experiences over the years, some respondent said:-

> "In the seven years I have been doing it, I just think it has been a wonderful experience and I just really love doing it."

> "I think it has been a wonderful experience, looking after them. There has been sad times when they are naughty and you get the good times when they are ever so good and loving and show their affection."

While another said that she had thoroughly enjoyed looking after the children because...

> "...I have loved meeting the parents, and sometimes the aunties and uncles who came down. Sometimes this room has been filled with relatives when they have come over from Nigeria."

The carer who said that she had negative experiences was one who had children removed from her by parents without prior notice of intention to remove the child. She said:-

> "Well, I've been heartbroken when we lost Eliza. I didn't expect that; I didn't expect them to just come and take her. I expected a bit more time, but then I also expected us to stay in contact. That is the worst thing, not to be able to stay in contact."

2. RANKING OF EXPERIENCES: Of course, for people to have looked after other people's children voluntarily for many years, it meant that they did love it or as they said "enjoyed it". How then would they rank these experiences compared with other important things in their lives? Fifty three per cent of the respondents placed their experiences at the top. Thirty-seven per cent placed their private fostering experience only second to having their own biological children. Ten per cent placed their experiences at the bottom in a scale of 1-3 rating. These rankings were similar to the descriptions of foster carers' experiences. Fifty three percent also ranked their experiences at the top of other important things in their lives. Their ranking of experiences therefore reflected the initial descriptions of those experiences. The three categories of ranking into which these responses could be placed on a scale of 1-3 were reflected in some of the quotes cited below. One respondent gave a response which reflected her childhood experiences, and which also mirrored her initial motivation for fostering. She said that she would place her experience:-

> "Right at the top, actually. I had a nanny looking after me when I was little, and we never got any love, and I think this is the reason why I want to give these children. My mum went out to work and we had someone looking after us, but we didn't get love, so this is why I like to look after children who are unfortunate and have to be put in care."

Another would not see herself doing anything if not looking after the children. When asked how she would rank her experience, she said:-

> "Top of my list. What would I be doing now if I didn't have these children? I would be very bored. I am forty-one years old. I am not ready for the scrap heap yet. Nobody is going to stop me doing what I am doing. I will carry on doing it."

For those who did not expand on their responses in these ways, their responses were quite short and precise. Typical of these were responses like: "At the top". Nine respondents out of the 16 who ranked their experiences first or at the top, gave this response.

Those who ranked their experiences second (37%), said that their own children or the experiences of bringing those children up ranked top of their lists. Typical of these responses were:-

> "After having my own children, oh quite high up the list. It would have been a great experience that I would have missed if I hadn't decided to foster children. Because you can't replace that at all. Very high I would say after having my own children." (Respondent had 2 children of her own).

A respondent who had three children of her own said:-

> "Well next to our own children and our experiences with them; they come next on the list. We've got our children, then our foster children and that's how it is. If we go on holiday, I buy for my children, and if there is any money enough, then we usually buy for the foster children. They are just an extension of the family."

The response of one respondent practically summed up the views of those who ranked their experiences second only to having their own children. She said:-

> "Practically at the top of the list, next to having my own children I should say. Most important thing in my life is having my own children and then after that, once they grew up, looking after these children - because this was what I was meant to do obviously in life."

Those who ranked their fostering of Black children third on their list (10%), had ranked their adoption experiences (of White children) first, and having their own grandchildren second. Their private fostering experiences only ranked third after those other two experiences.

The general conclusions that could be drawn both from foster carers' descriptions of their experiences, and their ranking of these experiences are;

i. The majority of them enjoyed what they were doing in bringing up children:

ii. Most of them valued these experiences very highly as demonstrated by how highly they ranked their experiences. Added to this was the fact that having infant children provided the carers another opportunity to demonstrate their parenting capabilities and skills; and also gave them a higher sense of fulfilment and satisfaction. It is no surprise then that many carers had positive experiences especially since many of the children arrived as infants and remained in placements until their teenage years.

3. PROBLEMS OF PRIVATE FOSTERING:

This aspect examined the problems or cost of private fostering that carers identified from their many years of fostering. The problems were put into the following categories.

- The general fostering situation (including low rate of pay);
- Children;
- Birth parents;
- Social Services Departments, and
- Dealing with Cultural issues.

Of the 30 respondents 80% (24 carers) said that they had one problem or the other in relation to the above categories, six foster carers said that they did not have any problems at all.

The General Fostering Situation: At the level of general costs to the foster carers and their families, the inadequacy of the amount parents' pay for the upkeep of their children was the main complaint.

Although a conscious decision was made by the researcher not to ask foster carers about how much they were paid for looking after each child, carers were asked whether any payment was involved and whether these were regular. All foster carers in the study complained that what parents paid them were inadequate, but that since their motives were not financial, they would keep the children even if parents did not pay. Those who volunteered such information said that they were paid between £10 and £35 per week. There was no standard rate but it depended on carer's ability to negotiate with the parents or how desperate a parent was for a place and able to pay. No payments were received for the six children who had no contacts with their birth parents. Of the 24 who said that they experienced problems, four said that their inability to go on holidays because they could

not take the children with them, was one of their general problems or frustrations they experienced

Three foster carers said that birth parents' demand for observance of cultural or religious practices was their main area of concern. These were in cases where parents requested that certain items of religious or cultural significance is put under the children's pillows or certain herbs put in the bathing water. These carers saw as problematic as they were asked to do against both their moral and cultural or religious dictates or because parents did not explain the significance or benefit of these items to the children. Some of them said that they only did it when parents were coming on a visit.

Finally while foster carers gave varying accounts of what they experienced as problematic in their fostering careers, these had not prevented them or were not of the magnitudes that outweighed their high-ranking of their experiences. The problems experienced with children, parents, Social Services Departments and/or the general costs, were not of the degrees that would have dented the positive description and high ranking of foster carers' fostering experiences.

Problems with the foster children: Forty-two per cent said they experienced problems with skin and hair care when they had the children initially, and when children had difficulties settling in the household. Other problems were those related to medical or health records, which were sometimes not available. Typical of responses that portrayed these were:-

> "The hair and skin are most difficult because some have got such dry skin. Being by the sea as we are here, it just used to crinkle sometimes. If I could get parents to get something that suited them that was fine. They had to bring something from Nigeria, which seemed to be the only thing that suited them. You can now buy them in London, but you couldn't in the old days."

> "In the beginning I didn't know much about looking after them. I had to learn how to treat their hair and skin. I didn't have any idea. I would have been glad if somebody would have given me some information at the time. I also had to learn to cook their food. I have had to learn through other people."

One family really tried to cope with a disabled child even though they were in their 70s and had to struggle to cope with the physical demands of looking after the child. Describing her problem, the foster carer said;

> "We have Musa, Jummai's brother who is handicapped. He is like a regiment of twelve naughty children all pushed into one. He has broken windows, glasses in the front room. He has broken ornaments but we still love him. He can't help what he is doing. It is his illness. You just love them for what they are."

The age of the child at the time of placement, and foster carers' age at that time also determined whether they said that they had problems with the children. Foster carers in the age groups 55 to 65 years and 66 and above said that they have often found it difficult to look after children of Playschool or pre-school ages. This was because of the physical demands of preparing and conveying them to, and from Nursery schools. This was typified by the response of a respondent who said:-

> "I find the arrival between two and three is a terrible time. Because they are ready for Playschool but they can't go unless they are clean and dry. By the time they are three, they are ready for Pre-school. So that is a very trying time because they need the attention of one-to-one basis and twenty-four hours a day or then twelve hours per day that they are awake. Of course when you have two or three of them running around, you won't have the energy to do all this for them. But if they are just babies you only feed and change them and they go back to sleep or playing." (Respondent was in her 60s).

The Birth Parents: Forty-two per cent said that their main problems with the birth parents were varied. These were problems regarding parents who would not visit their children regularly, those who would not take "no" for an answer when told that carers had no vacancies, or those who give confusing signals to both carers and children especially with regard to appointments for visiting and keeping these appointments. Added to these were those parents whom carers thought had a different perception of when a child is mature enough to assume certain responsibilities. This point was particularly stressed by foster carers whose teenage foster children had to look after their younger siblings when they went home to their parents at weekends or during school holidays. This had brought about some conflicts between carers and birth parents in the past when carers had accused birth parents of abuse and neglect of the children. This also brought to the fore the

differences in childrearing practice between West African parents and White English parents.

It is not unusual in West Africa that an eight-year old child is asked to look after his/her younger siblings while the mother goes to the market or the farm, while a known elder casts the traditional 'eye' on the children. The child has elders around keeping an eye on what goes on. The child would not in any way be seen as being neglected or abused by others in the community; whereas in the United Kingdom and other European societies this act would not be accepted. This indicates the notion of community responsibility of adults toward children in West Africa. Whereas a next door neighbour will gladly cast a supporting eye on the children while the mother or parents are out to the farms or engaged in some other activities, adults in the West faced with a child in a similar situation are more likely to alert the Social Services or the police about a likely case of child neglect or abuse. For other respondents, their problem was when parents refused to take the children home on weekends or school holidays. As one carer said:-

> "The only thing I have come across is making them take the children home. Then they would turn round and ask if you really love their child. I have been asked that question. I will say because she or he has got to learn to love you as much as me."

Another problem was when foster carers had to deal with separated or divorced parents who kept issuing conflicting directives to carers about what to do for, or with, their children. This was one of the concerns of a few carers as was succinctly expressed by one respondent who said that:-

> "The only situation I find very difficult to deal with is when you have a split family and the dad saying one thing, the mum saying another. I have to put my foot down and say "no". I find that very difficult to cope with. Then I get really angry and say I don't really care about your feelings, but I care about the child. That I find is the most difficult part of this job."

Problems with the Social Services Departments and those dealing with cultural issues are dealt with chapter eight and nine respectively.

4. QUALITY OF CONTACTS: Frequency of contact alone would not provide an indication of the quality of contact between children and their birth parents. Carers were asked how long such contact lasted and what sort of things the parents did when they visited. Typically parents spent between two to five hours with their children when they visited. These visits were usually at weekends and in most cases on Sundays. Of the 39 children visited, 25 visits lasted between two to five hours. Eight visits lasted all day while the remaining six visits lasted one hour or less. When asked to describe typical visits, foster carers' descriptions ranged from the unattached, non-communicating, and non-interacting, to the very involved, intense interaction parents had with the children. The following quotes sum up some of the descriptions of the non-interacting and non-involving contacts:

> "Twenty minutes, never any longer even on a birthday. She won't stay any longer"

> "Well it depends. If she's got work that night she might only stay half an hour or so"

> "It varies. Half an hour or she might just come down to Upminster station to see him and that could be about half an hour or an hour"

> "Jimoh's mum and dad, they could come down for an hour, but it's awkward for them to because they have got another one at Stamford, so they are pressed for time. But they'll have about half an hour to an hour and then they'll move on"

These indicated that these parents did not spend much quality time with the children since they were usually hurrying back to go to work or moving on to see other children in other foster homes. The 25 children who had two to five hours' time with their parents, appeared to have generally had intense interaction and involvement with parents.

For examples some foster carers described what birth parents do when they come as: -

> "She comes and sits in the chair and we chat about all sorts of things about her child. She listens to Bola. I keep a scrapbook of everything Bola wins in school. She shows her mum that - all her Awards, They talk a lot about how she is doing in school"

> "They all come down or Grandmother comes down and entertains her and fusses her and she likes her grandmother very much. She is quite happy with her"

> "They just play with them. There is a park just there, and in the summer we go over there and they play with the children".

These parents seemed to use these times to get to know their children or enable the children to get used to them. They talked about schoolwork, whatever had happened after the last visit, and also gave the children opportunities to ask the parents some questions. Those parents who stayed or visited all day, their involvement with their children was much more intense. Some of the things they did were described by foster carers variously as:

> "Lengy and Zoe's mother will stay all day. She will cook. I like her coming. She cooks and straightens Zoe's hair. We have a laugh and then she has to go in the evening. The children are always looking forward to each visit"

> "They might come for the whole day and we take the children out shopping and all that"

> "Those with babies, they would want to stay for hours.... They would want to change the babies to make sure that he hadn't got a sore bottom. I know the tricks. They look at the necks and ears to make sure that they are clean. When they are satisfied then they would go"

It was difficult to determine the things that parents discussed with children on telephone or the quality of communication by letters. It can only be assumed that the telephone calls and letters from parents to children helped to remind and reassure them of their parents' love and concern for them.

The quality of contacts between the children and their parents can be described as good for a majority of the children. This in a way suited those foster carers who wanted to be left alone to bring up the children, as they knew best. At another level the duration and intensity of contact between parents and their children in the study seemed to follow traditional African child fostering where parents do not have to constantly visit the child to remind him/her that they are his/her parents. In West Africa, constant visits to a child in kin fostering by the parents would be interpreted as doubts about the ability of the foster family to bring up the child. It might be that since West African parents wanted to have time to either work or study, their minimal involvement with how the children are looked

after is a fulfilment of their need to have time to concentrate on these activities thereby giving the foster carers adequate time to also concentrate on the business of looking after the children. In the absence of data from the birth parents this would remain as informed speculation.

i. Relationship of children with birth parents:

Relationship between children and their parents was measured on a 3 -point scale of good, average and bad. Foster carers were asked to describe the relationships between the children and their parents. Forty three percent of the children (30 children) had relationships that were described as 'good'.

Twenty nine percent (20 children) had relationships that were described as 'average' or difficult while 27% had 'bad' relationships with their parents. These included the six children who had no contact at all. Their relationships were described as non-existent.

A good relationship was described in terms of how the children reacted to the presence of the parents by being close to the parents and engaging them in conversation; and being happy to go home to the parents at weekends or during school holidays. Foster carers portrayed these good relationships using the following expressions: -

> "Well he is very fond of her and he loves her to cuddle him and that. He enjoys going home because she spoils him....In fact I think she spoils him a bit too much because when he comes back its - why can't we go to McDonalds for our tea?"

> "Good, very good. Especially Tonyi, she's bowled over by her dad more than anything"

> "She loves her mummy. She has a good relationship. She is all over her, brown mummy, brown mummy"

Foster carers described average relationships in the following ways: -

> "Well, I can't say it is loving. It's not like a normal family where you say hello mummy and give them a cuddle. She will come in and say hello. But they won't give her a cuddle. They would rather say hello and run out there and play. It's just a formality.... She is just a visitor. I suppose a person who has been fostered out most of their life, they don't know what it is to have a kiss and cuddle from Mum"

> "The big one has a conflict with his mum at the moment. She says one thing and then she changes it and says another. Boomer knows this but he accepts her for what she is, his mother. She knows that as well"

> "Average. He doesn't really know his mum, only when I have been around. If she phones up and says I love you, I love you. He knows that was his mum but because he has been with me for so long, I think that he finds it very hard"

These quotations also brought out the differences in the perception about how parents ought to show love and affection to their children. While an English mother may show love and affection to her child by cuddling and kisses, such practices are not the norm in West Africa.

West African parents may show their love through bringing gifts and presents rather than cuddles and kisses for the child.

Bad relationships were described in terms of the children and parents not getting along or children reacting badly to visits by parents. Some of these were typified by expressions such as: -

> "In Bola and Tayre's case, she is just a person that visits who is mummy. Nothing in common with the mother"

> "Well, her dad she doesn't know obviously. She came to England as a very small baby. She gets on with her grandmother all right but I suppose she would have her mother been what I call a proper mother to her. She would have got on with her mother all right. But she doesn't know her as a mother"

These findings also have to be taken with some caution especially as these were the foster carers' perceptions of what the relationships appeared to them rather than what the children said they were. Moreover 41 percent of the children were under five years and would have naturally become attached to their caregivers especially when the children were placed quite early at birth, or even the other grown ups who showed reservations about overtly showing their love and affection for their parents for fear of hurting the feelings of their carers who had been their consistent care givers.

ii. Effects of contacts with birth parents on children: Foster carers said that there were no observed negative effects of birth parents' contacts with their children; save for foster carers' concerns about some parents who did not allow children to settle in their new placements before they visited.

On the other hand, there were some foster carers who said that they would like the parents to increase the frequency of contact with their children. Given that these responses were also those of the foster carers, it is difficult to draw any definite conclusions from them since the children were not interviewed to elicit their views and feelings about contact with their birth parents. The accounts presented are carers' perception of how contact with parents affected the children from their observation of how children reacted when parents visited, when they left and how the children behaved or showed any negative signs after return from weekends or holidays with their parents.

iii. Stopping Contact: The overwhelming view seemed to be the need for children to know who their parents were, keep in touch with their family because they were expected to return to these families in the future. It was therefore necessary to enable children to maintain contact with their birth parents or families of origin. However, even though foster carers were in favour of continuous parental contact, they would try to prevent contact under certain circumstances. Fifty three percent said that they would prevent or try to stop further contact between parents and their children if there were cases of abuse involved. If parents were known to or have maltreated the children and which foster carers did regard as abuse they would seek to prevent further contact. Thirty seven percent said that under no circumstances would they prevent contact between the children and their birth parents. Ten percent said that they would temporarily stop contact if that

was upsetting the child or if either parent or other siblings with parents had any medical condition that continuous contact would expose the child to the risk of infection.

Carers' justification for continued contact between birth parents and their children were communicated in the following quotes:-

> "Well, if the don't, then are going to sort of suddenly go home to their parents whom they don't really know. They haven't seen or contacted them and I think that could do them a lot of harm"

"Oh yes, they are their flesh and blood"

"Well I think it is good for the child as well. Then they know who their real parents are and if they visit them the children are not being neglected"

"Yes, because one day they are going back to their mother. They must do because it is not fair on the mother if they don't. One day they are going to go back so you have to tell them about their mother. They should keep in contact with their parents"

iv. Children's awareness of their foster status: The revelation that foster carers regarded and treated their foster children as part of the family would suggest either that they would hide the fact from the children of their being fostered (which will be very hard to disguise the difference in colour) or provide little information about children's family background, which would then make it easy for them to bring the children up as their own. Ninety percent of the children were said to be aware that they were fostered. Nine percent were too young to understand the situation according to the foster carers. In 96 percent of the sample, children were informed of their foster status by the foster carers. In only two cases were children told by their birth parents that they were fostered. It is interesting to note also that the children were calling their foster carers as "mum" and "dad" and calling their birth parents as either "London mum or dad" or for those whose parents were in Nigeria, "Nigerian mum and dad".

Foster carers said that telling the child that they were fostered also meant telling them why someone else was looking after them other than their parents. The following quotations were some of the responses from foster carers on how they told the children and some of their justifications: -

> "Yes, we stress this from the start. They know that we are not their real mums, they know who their real mum is. I do tell them and they want to know why they are with us. And I tell them why, because mummy has to go to work or college to learn just like they go to school. And mummy has to work to get money to buy them things".

> "As soon as they are old enough to understand that I am not their natural mother, I tell them. I always make it special. I say they've got two parents. Their birth parents live in London and their mother Jane who lives here... I've always explained why they are with me. I explain that their mum's working and that's why they are with me".

Whether children understood the reasons and explanations about why their parents could not look after them is one thing; but we do know that 27 percent had relationships with their birth parents that were described as 'bad'. Two groups of siblings made up of six children (2 and 4) in two families had "particularly bad relationships with their birth parents" the carers said, so much so that the children would leave the house when the parents visited. Four children in one family age 9 – 14 were said to have felt that the parents did not love them when they were young (even when the parents had forcefully taken them back to live in Nigeria for six years) and should not attempt to disrupt their current stable relationships with the foster family.

The other two siblings, a boy and a girl, only communicated with their mother by telephone. The parent (mother) was said to have rejected the male child on suspicion of him being mentally retarded. Now ten and twelve years old the children may have become aware of this and have therefore rejected their birth mother. If foster carers told the children or made them aware of their foster status "as soon as they are able to understand", and we know that 54 percent of the children were placed within twelve months of birth (57% girls and 53% of boys), it is no wonder that 90 percent of the children would have been aware of their foster status. Moreover, 45 percent of the children were in placement for four and a half years or more at the time of the interviews. So if 90 percent were aware of their foster status, how did they feel about their situation and the arrangements? Children who were too young to express any opinions to the foster carers made up 40 percent of the sample (28 children).

Table 7.2. Carers' description of how the children felt about the arrangements.

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	N	%
Enjoy moving between parents and foster homes	8	12
Accept the situation as it is	13	19
Feels happy about it because parents have to work/study	4	6
Child questions the arrangements	2	3
Children never want to go home ever	11	16
The child expressed no opinion because foster home was the only place the child had known	3	4
Child too young to express an opinion	28	40
TOTAL	**69**	**100**

Table 7.2. shows what carers said reflected how the children felt about the private fostering arrangements. These foster carers referred to certain incidents in the past or how the children reacted to carers' suggestions that the children return to their birth parents.

A respondent who was fostering four siblings age 9 - l6 years said: -

> "I said to my youngest daughter well, don't you think that if it is a good idea for you to go and live with your parents in London now that they are here more and getting a flat? She said, I would rather sleep on a bench in Hyde Park Corner rather than stay with them. This is sad really. I said the same to the boy if he could go to a university in London and then stay with his parents. He said I am not going anywhere near them"

The above quotation referred to the same children who said they never want to go back to the parents and whose relationships with parents were described as 'bad'. Children who were told why their parents fostered them out seemed to accept the situation either from an understanding of the problems parents faced that led to the placements, or probably because it was not something they could do anything about. These were seen as the result of the knowledge that their parents were working and/or studying and that they (children) have grown to love where they were staying and had all their friends there. Insights into these were given by foster carers in some of their responses about what they thought were the children's' feelings about the arrangements

> "I think they just accept that their parents were working or they were at school. I found that they were ready to accept explanations like without making much fuss like our children. Our children would create such a fuss if things were not right but they seem to accept it as part of their lives"

The impression one gets from all of these is that children having become settled in their foster families and become attached, felt satisfied with the arrangements as long as there were no suggestions to return them permanently back to their birth parents. Thus 12 percent were said to be happily moving between their birth parents and foster families. As with many children coming into new environments, the children initially showed signs of anxiety when parents first left them with the foster carers. These, some of the foster carers said, were overcome quite easily as they made the children feel at home by the provision of toys and in some instances, the presence of other black children provided some comfort to the new arrivals. So at the time of the study every child was said to have settled in very well. This idea of the children having settled in was variously expressed thus: -

> "Very well. Children settle very quickly when they come. Usually it takes anything from twenty-four hours to about a week…but it takes really six months to a year for a child to settle in or be at home. These two have taken on quite quickly but others it may take nearly a year because of the way they have been treated in the past. They think you are going to treat them the same"

> "Marvellous, as I said, no problem if you take them early enough" I have not had any problems especially when we had her since she was five months old"

Settled in very well was also indicated by how….

> "The children just treat it like their homes. They come and go. They class it as home and if you told them it wasn't their home they would get upset"

> "They settled really well. They class me as their second family because they are more here than they are at home. They have told me that I care more about them than their parents. I've got time to spend with them…they just love being here".

When looked at against the fact that 81 percent of the children were placed within 24 months of their birth and would probably have been in the same foster family for up to or more than four and a half years, these children "would have known very little other life outside the foster families;" one foster carer said.

v. Carers' views about the birth parents. When asked their opinions about the birth parents with regard to their general attitude to and treatment of their children, 63 percent (i.e. 19 carers) viewed the birth parents positively, 30 percent had negative views about them while seven percent had ambivalent attitudes toward the birth parents. The positive views were classed into two broad categories in terms of "Birth parents' love of their children" and being perceived as "nice people". Of the 19 positive views, 12 foster carers said the parents loved their children and seven others said that the parents were nice people.

Negative views of birth parents were expressed thus:-

> "When I started, I used to think that the parents didn't care about their children. However I soon realised that they care for their children by putting them with foster parents. They only want other people to look after the children and care for them while they were doing something else you see".

This initial confusion about birth parents' love for their children would probably have arisen out of the lack of communication and adequate information about the reasons, objectives and duration of placements when the children were first placed. Negative views of parents were sometimes the result of carers' perception of them as uncaring (6 carers) or not nice persons (1 carer) or when parents accuse the foster carer of inciting the children against them (2 cases). Those whose responses were neither positive nor negative were torn between sympathy with parents' difficulties and blaming them for seeming to have no time for their children. Examples of negative expressions about the parents by foster carers were put in the following quotes:-

> "I would say that Fiola and Buki's mother is unfair; totally. She is totally irresponsible. She hasn't made any effort to know her children. There is no love. If she comes and the girls want to show her their schoolwork, she will take it and say mmm yes that is it. There is no praise; she won't praise them. The only thing she ever said was that Buki was too fat. Why she doesn't show any pride in what her children do I don't know"

"Maji's mum, I wouldn't say she was a sensitive person, really. She's not very good tempered and she can raise her temper a lot. She likes to be the lady of the manor. I learned she is in Nigeria but that cannot be the case here in this house. Apart from the cruelty, I would say that there is a special bond between her and maji"

One respondent recalled a particularly bad experience:-

> "Well we all thought that Pauline was a nice person even though we only saw her once every three or four months and was never here long enough. We all thought that she was a nice person until this upset and then she turned out to be really wicked; she threatened to kill me. She said that she was going to put a spell on the children and everything else. When the girl was home with her on holiday she would ask her to get up at five in the morning to do the house work and if it wasn't done right, she had her face slapped and her mum abused her in the bath as well"

In West Africa children learn their various gender specific roles very early in life. Thus when a little girl of seven or nine years is asked to clean the house early in the morning before going to school or having breakfast, it is regarded as part of the training for her future role as a woman. But to a West African child brought up in a white household, this will present a confusing and anxious moment since the child is not used to doing such chores; thus children's anxiety about going home for weekends or schools holidays. The consequence is likely to be that the carers get the wrong impressions about whether the parents love their children or maltreat them.

vi. The Roles of Birth Fathers. The birth fathers in this study played less significant roles in the arrangements for placements and contacts with the children especially visits to children. Mothers were generally the ones at the forefront of the arrangements. This is supported by the fact that in none of the 69 placements was the father the initiator or the first point of contact. While foster carers said they had at some time come across or had contact with children's fathers, these were the exception rather than the rule. Foster carers were likely to meet the fathers if the parents were still married and were living together in London. The intention of the question was to have an idea of the involvement of birth fathers in placing their children in private foster care or visiting them. All foster carers in the study said that they had contact with some birth fathers of the children they were fostering. Table 7.3 gives a breakdown of the frequency of contact that foster parents had with the birth parents.

Table 7:3 How often foster carers saw the fathers of the children?

	No	%
Saw them always.	5	17
Had only occasional contacts	14	47
Once at the start of placement	4	13
Very rarely	3	10
Never seen them	4	13
Total	**30**	**100**

Table 7.3 shows that there were foster carers who never met with the fathers of the children they were fostering.

However 17 percent said that they had always met the fathers of the children they were fostering. A majority (47%) had occasional, but not often, contact (either through face to face or telephone contact). Foster carers were in general agreement that birth mothers were the main actors when it came to arranging placements or keeping contact with the children. Thus just as childcare responsibilities are more of a 'woman's thing' in West Africa, so is finding alternative childcare provisions in the United Kingdom. A West African couple faced with childcare problems in the United Kingdom would expect the wife, whose responsibility it is traditionally, to seek other forms of childcare if she cannot perform that role herself.

SECTION FIVE.

1. CHILDREN'S' RETURN HOME:

As this study has so far shown, West African children in private foster care have often been placed with very little pre-placement preparations and indeterminate duration or purpose. Given this scenario and past research finding(Triseliotis (1990) and Lowe, 1990), one would expect that most if not all, placements of West African children in private foster care would be short lived.

However evidence from this study points to the contrary and that most of the children (50% boys and 40% girls) were in placements for four and a half years or more at the time of the study. Factors such as parental contact and the age at which these children were placed may have been responsible for the placements lasting the way they did. If there were no adequate pre-placement preparations for most of the placements and many of the placements lasted for an average of five years, what were the situations with regard to preparations for return home of children to their families of origin?

Again reference is made here to the findings in chapter five in which there were no definite time limits agreed for which placements would last. Although carers (93%) said that there was an agreement about how long each child would stay with them, only two carers confirmed that these were written. In addition no carer gave a definite time frame in months or years regarding how long they were going to keep the children. Most of them (60%) believed that the children would be in their households "until they finish school". Other conditions were either until parents completed their studies (13%), until parents got good jobs (10%), or good housing (10%). Not only were there no concrete plans or agreements before the children were placed, no carer was certain when the parents could remove the child from placement. But children did go back and the study therefore wanted

to find out what preparations were usually made either by the foster carers or birth parents before the children went back or were removed. Since this meant asking foster carers to recollect from past experiences (since also every foster carer in the sample had fostered a child that had gone back to the birth parents), they were unable to provide specific statistics of the number of children that went back with or without proper plans made.

i. **Notification for Return-** The general experience of all foster carers in the study was that parents did give them notice that they were removing children from placements. However, the problem was both the manner and interval between notice of intention to remove and when the child was actually removed. Foster carers said that parents employed various means to inform them of the intention to remove their children. The main channel was through Telephone calls to the foster carer. This, most foster carers said, did not give them much time to prepare the children for return especially when the child had fully settled-in and become more like a member of the family.

On whether the parents of the last child that went back gave adequate notice, one carer said: -

> "No, Tokunbo's mum phoned me eight o'clock Friday night when Tokumbo was already in bed. So it came as a bit of a shock... We did quickly take her down to her last wee, but they don't really give you time to prepare"

Sometimes a child was removed a few days after placement when birth parent realised that the distance and cost of travel or care would be very expensive. Foster carers' concerns in this respect were usually for the emotional turmoil the sudden removal would have on the child.

One carer said: -

> "It's awkward, because the parent can phone up and say it's too far out or it costs too much. They will ring up and say we have changed our minds and we'll be coming down to pick them up tomorrow.

> That really makes me bubble a little bit because bringing the child down here for a couple of days and then wrenching it away, the child doesn't know whether it is coming or going"

However, it was not always that birth parents got their ways and removed the children after short notices. Some foster carers insisted on three months notice to be given to them within which they prepared the child. Preparations usually involve "telling them that you will soon go home to your parents for good, and keep repeating it so that the child gets used to it" Foster carers said that from their experiences, most teenagers usually did not want to go back and would resist any attempt to send them back by either absconding from their foster homes or, as some carers said, "playing up". Return home is an area that has created much conflicts and controversies in the past between foster carers and birth parents. The bone of contention has sometimes centred on the mistrust created by parents' actions. That is when parents take the children home for holidays only to ring the carers that the child was not returning. Thirty seven percent of the carers said that they had experienced this situation in the past.

One carer who had repeated instances like that with one family said: -

> "I have always known from the start that they would go back but I wouldn't like it if it were sprung on me like that. I did have a couple of bad experiences with this particular family. I had the little boy for three years and all of a sudden he went home for Christmas and never came back. The same thing happened with his sister. I thought that when they had done one they wouldn't do the second one the same but they did...I just got a phone call from them saying "Happy Christmas", they are not coming back, they like it here and that was it - done, finished and I have never seen or heard from them since"

instances like this have not only had devastating effects on foster carers, the whole issue around children returning home had been described variously as "devastating", "hurtful", "painful" and "upsetting" by foster carers.

ii. Carers' Reactions to children's Return Home.

Foster carers were asked a two-prong question regarding how they would react or feel if the children fostered with them went back; and how they had felt when other children they had fostered went back? All 30 carers answered the first question. They were not looking forward with excitement to the day when the children would leave. Responses ranged from those who would or had felt upset for missing the children, to being devastated and heart broken.

Table 7:4 How carers would react to children's return home.

	NO	%
Upset/Sad/Cry	8	26
Hurt/painful/Terrible	11	37
Devastated/Heartbroken	11	37
TOTAL	30	100

Carers stated that they had had similar reactions when other children had left. The depth of these feelings became apparent only when they were asked why they reacted the way they did or said they would if the children left. Foster carers' reasons for how they would feel and how they reacted and/or felt in the past fell into three categories. Sixty three percent (19 carers) said because they had always treated or brought the children up as their own or members of their own family; 17 percent said it was because of the bonding from bringing the children up. Thirteen percent said it was because of the love they had for the children; while two carers (7%) said they had felt devastated, upset and heartbroken because birth parents had given the impression that the children were given to them for good. This perception had led them to concentrate on bringing up the children with no expectations that they would return to their birth parents only for the children to be removed. One of the carers said: -

> "At first when she came and said, here you are, she's yours, then I really thought that she was mine. Oh dear, I hadn't really known about it properly yet. That is why it broke my heart when she wanted him back"

That first experience taught her that when West African parents say "here take the child, it is yours", they do not mean giving up the child for good but it is said to give the foster carer confidence to bring the child up as if it were her own child.

The problem is further exacerbated by the lack of clear and enforceable agreements on the duration of placements. It is worth noting that foster carers are able to concentrate on bringing up these children or integrating them into their families even though they were never certain when the parents would make the telephone call requesting for a child's return. The nature of the relationship is one that resembles Holman's (1975) concept of 'inclusive' and 'exclusive' type of fostering. However, the fact that parents have contacts as and when they want, excludes the notion of their exclusion whereas the free hands carers had to bring the children up as they wanted with virtually no input from parents, gives the notion of some kinds of exclusive practice. But that is where it stops; 'exclusion' and 'inclusion' as described by Holman (1975) does not exist in the kind of relationships between parents and carers in this study. At another level of analysis, carers' devotion in the face of uncertainty might be the consequences of the freedom with which birth parents have allowed them to get on with it with minimal interference.

Although foster carers said that they always felt upset, devastated, hurt and heartbroken when the children left, this feeling of loss had often been overcomed by the arrival of other children into the households. Restating how they often felt, the following carers said: -

> "Oh terrible, but I am lucky because in the next couple of weeks I always get a phone call to have another one but it is just heartbreaking"

> "Oh heartbroken sometimes, yes heartbroken. But when they come I always have at the back of my mind that they are not yours... If you always think that you are just trying to give them a start in life and looking after them and they are not yours, then it doesn't cause too much heartbreak. I always had a waiting list in the old days as one went another came in very quickly"

> "It was a horrible feeling. I felt I have fostered and she is gone. But I thought I am doing a job and I know that I can't keep them forever. But I felt terrible inside, but then I thought I have to get another one to replace her"

However the more traumatic feelings or reactions were often with the first sets of children and those that would have been in placements for up to three years or more.

These feelings of loss by carers were often very severe for some of them as to make them contemplate suicide. This was the case with one foster carer who said: -

> "When the first two went back I was really sad, but when the last one went I was devastated...I have never left that boy with anyone. He was everything to us. When he went it was like a death in family...the house was so quiet and for about two weeks I couldn't eat, sleep or anything. I was devastated. If I didn't get Moji to replace him, I think I would have "topped" myself. That's how bad it was"

It has to be said however that a significant number of the foster carers (40%) said that they never lost sight of the fact that the children were not their own and would go back to their parents one day. Asked why they reacted the way they did when the children went back, some of them gave philosophical responses that showed or brought out their motherly and loving sides.

> "You can't have a child for that length of time and not get fond of it, now can you? Whether it is black or white. That is not the way it works, you have to be in the situation at the time with the children"

> "Every time any of the children left they take a piece of my heart"

> "Because you raise them you feel like you have given birth to them. So it is like somebody tearing your child away from you. You know every single thing about the child than their mothers do. Like Tola, now the only thing is that she never came from my womb. Apart from that, she is mine"

Expressions like these permeated responses of the 40 percent who felt that the bond between them and the children sometimes coloured their judgement regarding the children's return home. However sometimes foster carers found comfort from the fact that some of the children do keep in touch after returning home.

As put by a carer in her mid fifties, who never had children of her own, and who said that she had fostered more than 50 children in the past: -

"Well, I feel as if I am losing a member of my family. Even though they still phone and come and see me, but I still feel as if you have lost a child of your own"

iv. Post-placement contacts. Since one of the ways which foster cares said they overcame their feelings of upset, devastation and heartbreak was the reassurance that they would and did keep in touch with the children, they were asked about whether they were still in touch with the children.

Table 7.5. Carers' contact with children they had looked after in the past.

	NO	**%**
Yes, all of them.	2	7
Most of them.	11	36
Some of them.	15	50
None.	2	7
TOTAL	30	100

There was no difference between how the children went back home and whether carers kept in touch. Table 7.5 shows a high level of contact between foster carers and those children they fostered in the past but who had returned home to their birth parents. How these links are maintained varied between carers and where the children resided. The predominant form of contact was by telephone calls children make to the carers. Many children returned to the foster carers during school holidays. In fact in three cases, not only had the children kept in touch, the foster carers were at the time of the study fostering their children as well. Thus the same carers were fostering a second generation of the same family. The children that usually return for summer holidays to their former foster carers were never notified to the social services.

All foster carers who had children coming back to stay for short periods (7 cases) said that they did not think that they needed to inform the social workers about these children who in most cases usually stayed for more than 28 days.

One carer who had one of the returnees at the time of interviews said: -

> "I have got one here but I haven't informed social services. That's the little one that just came in. I had her when she was nine weeks old. She went back when she was two years old. I've been in contact with her. Her mum rang last week and said Oh Marge I am in Birmingham and I want her to come to you for the holiday. I said okay, bring her down and she came down Sunday. She is here until she goes back to school in September"

When opinions were sought about suggestions that since carers were hired to do a specific job (look after the children until the parents had them back) and once that ended, their contact or role should also terminate, the foster carers overwhelmingly (77%) rejected any suggestion of stopping post placement contact between them and the children. Seven carers (23%) said that it depended on whether the parents wanted it or not. No carer was in favour of the severance of contact at the point of the termination of placement. Foster carers who said that it depended on whether birth parents wanted further contact, gave fascinating reasons why they thought so. Some of these accounts were: -

> "Its hard, but if their parents don't want contact you know and they think that it would upset the child then you have to accept their words. I don't think that you should force yourself on them"

> "Well, if that is the way they want it, it is up to them. I am quite happy to keep in touch but if the parents think that it will upset the child too much and that it was better to break the contact, well then, that is all right with me. I've done my own bit, I've started the child off, hopefully I've given it a good start and the parents must carry on now"

> "I mean if that is what the parents want then obviously I would have to sit back and think, well it is their child they have a right to say we would rather not confuse him any more you know"

For foster carers (23) who were vehemently opposed to any cessation of link, their responses also conveyed strong emotions as they tried to justify why contacts should be retained.

Some these were expressed in the following ways: -

> "They can do more harm to the child that way. I think that if the child has been in a foster family for a long time, it needs to keep that relationship with that foster parent. Gradually as the years go on it might just want to pull away from you, but its nice to know that they can pick the phone up and say "Hello" and know that you are still there for them...I do know a lot of black people do like to break it, but it does the child more harm. I know it has done in the past"

> "I think that is bad. It's just like throwing a dog out really. How can you have someone in your home for three years and never see him or her again? Ludicrous, isn't it?"

> "I think we should keep contact especially if you had the child a long time. I think it important because in years to come they could grow up and get married and want their children fostered out"

One respondent felt so strongly about contact that she followed up two of the four siblings she was fostering to Nigeria and spent six months there until the parents agreed to let her have them back. Even though the carers seemed to have carried the heavier burden of costs for looking after the children while they (children) were with them, return to birth families instead of being seen as relief for carers, there was no evidence of this from the ways carers struggled to maintain contacts. Carers' readiness to allow the children to visit or when they travel out to West Africa to check on the welfare of these children does not support this.

In all of these cases cited, only in one instance did a foster carer say that she would involve the social services in either negotiating or finding out where the child had gone back to or how he/she was doing. In the one case the foster carer said: -

> "If that child was taken from you for any reason at all you should contact the social worker so that the social worker can go and find out how that child is getting on. If you don't keep in touch, when that child grows up and thinks back, it will think, oh I had a bad nanny or one who didn't care about me because she didn't contact me when I left".

At the time of the interview this carer had a running disagreement with her social worker for not checking out rumours that an eight-year-old girl removed from her household had been fostered to another family in a neighbouring county.

Summary.

This chapter set out to examine the fostering experiences of foster carers. It began with an examination of their motivation, which parties were involved, their expectations and the preparations usually associated with private fostering. It also went on to examine carers' role expectations and duties to the children including benefits to them and the children; the opinions of the husbands or male partners, including carers' own families and the local community, was also examined. Foster carers' parenting styles, what they aimed to achieve, their knowledge of child development and understanding of the needs of

children of West African children brought up in their households were also discussed. It looked at what forms punishment took and who administered them, and also examined the children's relationships with their parents in addition to carers' perception of the birth parents.

Firstly foster carers were motivated by their desire to nurture **babies**; desires arising from having brought up their own children but now had time on their hand and wanted to start another family. Foster carers expressed their motivations in terms of their 'love of and fondness' for children, and the desire to help unfortunate or underprivileged children. Women were the main initiators for arranging placements, and once that was discussed with other members of the family, everyone did their bit to ensure that the placements succeeded. Secondly foster carers saw their duties as providing the children a better start in life through better upbringing and the provision of the English ways of life; expecting to benefit from the satisfaction usually derived from the love and affection that the children would give them in return, and knowledge that the children have been able to imbibe English values and mannerism. Children's path to placements was either through advertisements or informal communications among carers.

On parenting, foster carers saw their roles as parent substitutes who were to provide care and nurturing to the children until the birth parents were ready to resume their parenting responsibilities although the manner of placement gave them the impression that the children were given to them for good. Carers assumed that they were expected to provide love and care, to give children good upbringing, provide physical care, and/or to provide support to the children to grow up as good persons.

An overwhelming majority was of the view that the children needed to have knowledge about who they were, their family backgrounds and the culture from which they or their parents originated, but While birth parents demanded physical punishment, carers favoured other methods such as 'grounding', 'curfew' or the denial of certain privileges.

Majority of foster carers regarded the children as part of their family. Foster carers' perception were further given weight by the fact that they often receive the children as infants and children would remain in placements until well into their teenage years, having become attached to the carers. Thus the practice can be partially described as partly inclusive and partly exclusive in the sense that parents were involved by way of contact, but foster carers entirely determined the parenting styles and approach.

Carers described their experiences as positive, using such phrases as "marvellous", "very enjoyable", "very good" and "wonderful experience". With such descriptions, carers also ranked their experiences very highly, sometimes only second to the experiences of bringing up their own children. The major problems that carers experienced were about birth parents' unreasonable demands or not maintaining regular contact with their children and their unwillingness to provide enough information about themselves or the children especially with respect to medical histories, dietary habits, allergies and care histories. In terms of costs, no carer saw their almost subvention of the cost of care as any problem. Carers as part of the expectations described these costs (financial and material) as the price they had to pay for the love and affection that the children gave them.

The majority of the children had good relationships with their parents and all those who were old enough to understand, knew that they were fostered. All foster carers were in favour of the continuation of contact between the children and their birth parents and would only prevent continuos link if the parents were known to abuse or harm the children in any way or if there were risks of the children catching some infectious diseases. Carers also generally perceived birth parents as nice people who loved their children.

The birth fathers played minimal if not neglected roles in private fostering; just as men are less prominent in the care of infants in West Africa. Finally, although birth parents sometimes gave notice of intentions to remove their children, this did not always give foster carers enough time to prepare the children for the return home.

The Social Services were seen to play only peripheral role in all placements. This situation may also be indicative of the nature of the relationships between carers, birth parents, and the SSD and the outright neglect of the rights and interests of the children or their right to have their views taken into consideration when placements are planned.

Foster carers described their reactions and feelings about the children's return variously as "devastated", "heartbroken", "upset", "painful" and "terrible". Many carers were severely affected by the children's departure. There was however a general agreement among all foster carers that contact of some kind or link be maintained with the children and their families even if they have returned home.

CHAPTER EIGHT.

SUPPORT NETWORKS.

This chapter looks at the support networks of foster carers and the types of support they used.

Support was defined as any action or behaviour that assisted the foster carers in meeting their parenting goals, or in dealing with demands of their task. These supports could either be material or other intangible forms of assistance such as encouragement, personal warmth, love or emotional support. Support also include advice or the giving of information and/or guidance on how to meet the needs of the children fostered; needs which ranged from physical care to the development of cultural and linguistic identities. To assess the levels and direction of support to foster carers, the Ecomap was used. The Ecomap is a pencil and paper measure that collects information about the size and composition of the network, the extent to which network members provide various types of support, and the nature of relationships and support within the network as perceived by the person completing the map. Foster carers were asked to indicate (using an Ecomap) where they had support and to rank them in order of the strength of these supports. Table 8.1 represents their responses.

Table 8:1 where foster carers had support for looking after the children.

Source of Support	No of Families	Strongest source	
Extended Family	26	15	50%
Friends/neighbours	28	5	17%
Doctors/Health Visitors	22	3	10%
Birth Parents	21	3	10%
Schools	18	-	-
Other Carers	15	3	10%
Social Services	13	1	3%
Churches	2	-	-

NB. *The number of families here refers to the number out of the 30 families interviewed who mentioned or indicated each of these sources of support.*

The single most important source of support to carers came from members of their own immediate or extended families. Fifty percent indicated that the strongest source of support was their own families. Seventeen percent said their support came from friends or neighbours. Three each mentioned birth parents, doctors and other carers as the main sources of support, while only one carer mentioned the social services as a main source of support.

Support is a vital part of fostering; enabling foster carers to undertake their specific tasks and responsibilities. Intimately linked to the ability of parents to provide adequate care for their children is the level of support they receive in their parenting role. Triseliotis (1995) and Quinton et al (1998) provided evidence that a good package of support for foster carers will not only reduce placement breakdowns but also reduce damaging unplanned moves. Though the research in this field has mainly been conducted within the realms of public care, conclusions reached are that supporting foster carers maximises their effectiveness and prevents the breakdown of placements.

The problems associated with substitute care are intense in some ways for those families who take the decision to look after other people's children who, in most cases present problems. But most importantly for West African children in transracial placements. For white families fostering these children therefore the issue is the support they will need to enable the children settle in and to be able grow to have the knowledge and identity of who they are and their cultural, racial and linguistic backgrounds. Foster carers' ability to accomplish their fostering tasks therefore depends to a large extent on the types and range of support they receive from their environment.

Types of Support.

Types of support vary depending on the nature of the problem. The group or individuals approached also depends on the issues the carers are faced.

The kinds of support foster carers got from their immediate or extended families were varied but included asking either a sister, aunt, grown up children or other close members of their families to look after the children while they went into hospital, travelled or went out shopping; as well as the warmth, love and understanding shown to carers. This reliance on foster carers' families, friends and neighbours were very pervasive, and some of the carers expressed them in the following ways: -

> "My family gives me tremendous support. I get support from them if I need a baby sitter"

> "My family is very supportive. I can call on them anytime I want someone to look after them while I travel for a few days"

However, even though foster carers relied on their families for support, these were for physical care because they did not rely on these family members for advice regarding particular parenting issue relating to the children.

As put by one foster carer: -

> "I wouldn't go to my daughter for advice about how to look after the children because they don't know what I know about the child so intimately"

Carers through their fortnightly 'coffee mornings' (in one local authority) also provided support to one another by exchanging information and allowing children to meet and mix with other Black children in the community in addition to exchanging material items. Eight foster carers had coffee mornings once every fortnight. One respondent put the function of the coffee mornings as: -

> "If anybody's got any troubles we all sit round and try to sort it out. We all ring each other and say so and so has come back without clothes, and that's another favourite thing, the clothing…So we pass clothes, outgrown clothes, we come with out little bundles and if I say oh, I've got a baby of six months coming in tomorrow, they would say oh I've got this, I've got that…These could be pushchairs or car seats; we do it all the time. There is about eight of us I think"

Another respondent who also attended the coffee mornings said: -

> "If I've got any problems I used to ring up others who also fostered because social services didn't do much. But I ring my friends up and you get more out of them about your problems than from social services"

Most carers regarded themselves as friends and therefore felt obliged to help each other, since many would also have been introduced to private fostering by these friends. The Schools were supportive by helping the children to settle in. Foster carers said that the schools not only provided environments conducive for learning, but also sometimes dealt with racist incidences that foster children were sometimes subjected to by other pupils in the schools, but this was not indicated as a strong source of support.

Birth parents provided information regarding cultural and dietary matters. If foster carers were in doubt about anything about a foster child, the parents if easily contactable, were the first people carers sought advice from before going to the doctors. Doctors and Health Visitors provided medical and other health support such as diagnosis and treatment of illnesses and relevant infant and child health information and advice

The Role(s) of Husbands or Male Partners.

There were twenty (20)-married households in the study and 10 single parents. Of these married couple families, interviews were held with 11 husbands about their role(s) and the kind of things they did to assist their wives look after the West African children.

All husbands viewed their roles as father figures that provided both the emotional and material support to their wives. Six of the husbands said that they assisted their wives with some of the domestic chores such as cooking, running the bath and washing the children. Husbands said that outdoor activities were their responsibilities to organise as one of them put it: -

> "We go to football together, the parks and I also take them to the seaside at the weekends. I do help her with the boys and if they want to earn some money, they can Hoover the car or clean the car and I give them 50p for it"

Most responses reflected the fact that because husbands were not the prime movers for decision to foster, they saw their roles and responsibilities as supporting their wives emotionally or standing by them since the children were seen to provide the fulfilment that their wives desired. This was reflected in the responses of some of the husbands who said that what they did depended on what the wives told them to. When asked the sort of things they did to help their wives, some of them gave these responses: -

> "Well, anything that she asks me. She asks me to do this or do that. We take the kids out; we go here we go there. Everything, anything that is wanted to do it will be done"

> "I take her to London whenever she wants to see the children, when they are on holiday. I am the one that goes out to work to support them. I get them ready for bed and everything that I would do for my own children.

Apart from being the main breadwinners (since only two out of 20 wives were employed), the husbands were also engaged in the physical care of the children. Asked about what they thought their responsibilities were to the children, many of them answered thus: - "To give them love and affection", "give them a good upbringing", "To be there for them as their father", "to bring them up as I would my own children"; and "to maintain discipline". They also perceived as their role to "put bread on the table". These they did in addition to the normal responsibility for outdoor activities such as taking children to the parks or sporting activities. Although women were the prime movers of the initial decision to foster, once the children were in placements husbands saw it as their responsibility to make things work and thus make a success of the placement. Enabling placements to work by their support would not only cement the family relationships but demonstrate their success as parents too. The following quotes give insights into how some husbands perceived their roles and responsibilities:-

> "Well, my duty is to give them love and affection, same as my wife. There is no hold barred. We go sports. I get involved with the boys. I do most of the father things. If there is any punishment to be done I do it. The telly is off or they are grounded.

> "Well, I see my role exactly the same as what the wife sees it; to bring them up as I would bring up my own; treat them as if they were my sons or daughters. All the love that I can give them, all the understanding and education wise…I am the dad, I go out to work and the wife is the one to look after the children. I mean we might be a bit old fashioned but that's how we were brought up. Dad works, mum stays at home and looks after the children"

Carers' relationships with the Social Services Departments.

The roles of the SSD regarding private fostering are defined by the Children Act 1989 whether at the level of notification, actual placements, or the supervision of placements and of children's return home. The Children Act 1989 requires local authorities to satisfy themselves that individual private fostering arrangements are satisfactory and that foster carers and premises are suitable.

The interpretations of this provision have many ramifications, not only in the way that officials of the local authority see their involvement in private foster placements, but also in what foster carers expect these officials to do. The Children Act 1989 also provides clear guidelines on the extent of social work involvement in private fostering from pre-placement inspection, visits, reviews of placements, training of foster carers to plans for children's return home. However, while these responsibilities are very clear, Quinton et al (1998) observed that "the published statements about the services that these agencies will offer, are not usually specific, but couched in general terms"(pp 168). Foster carers were asked to describe the relationships between them and the social workers that were either supervising them or were meant to; how useful they found visits by social workers, what support they expected from them, and what role (s) they expected social workers to play in their fostering tasks?

When asked to describe their relationships with the Social Services Departments, foster carers' responded in ways as shown in table 8.2.

Table 8:2 Description of Relationships with the Social Services.

Description of Relationships	**N.**	**%**
Very Good	5	17
Good	7	23
Neither Good nor Bad	4	13
Bad	8	27
Very Bad	5	17
None	1	3
Total	**30**	**100**

Collectively, forty percent of the carers had positive relationships with the supervising agencies, whereas 47% had relationships that could be described as bad, very bad or non-existent. Thirteen percent could not say whether their relationships were good or bad. More that two-thirds (80%) categorised their relationships as generally weak. Only 16% described their relationships as strong. (Table 8.3).

Table 8.3. The strength of foster carers relationships with Social Services

Strength of Relationships	N.	%
Very Strong	1	3
Strong	4	13
Weak	14	47
Very Weak	10	33
No Relationship	1	3
Total	**30**	**100**

Of note here was the fact that the same foster carer who had said that her strongest source of support came from the social services was the only person who described her relationship with the social services as "very strong". Her words were: -

> "Oh yes, I have a very strong relationship with them. We get on fine. They know me so well and I've had so many children via them coming to supervise every six weeks and then once they are two, they come every three months. I just had the last six weekly visits because Maji is two and a half. They will come every three months, unless I have any difficulty and I can always phone my social worker".

Those who described their relationships with the Social Services either as "very good", "good" or "very strong" and "strong", had a positive opinion of social workers and the agency they represented. Further probes showed that foster carers held these views either because the social workers did not bother them about what they were doing or because foster carers were concerns that children would be abused or placed in unsuitable homes if there were no regular social work supervision. On the other hand, some carers explained the reason for the good relationship in terms of their being truthful to social workers about what they did concerning the children. Carer justified these opinions and reasons explicitly with expressions such as: -

"I have a very good relationship. I know a lot of people don't want them coming to check that the kids are all right if they feel they should. That is their job... The thing is with private fostering the children turn up on your doorstep and they are left but these parents don't know whom they are leaving their child with. I could be a child abuser. That is why social services should be involved and they should make sure that the house is safe and that the person looking after them is doing their job"

"I have never had problems whatsoever with the social services. I get on well with the social worker and the one before her. I have had quite a good relationship because I have always been honest with them. I can't see any point in hiding anything because if you do and they find out, that's it - messed up So, I think, you have to be up front with them"

The determinant of a relationship being described as good or bad was how foster carers perceived social workers either as interfering or challenging the standard of care, or allowing them to get on with what they were doing without much interference. Those who described their relationship with the Social Services departments as "bad", "very bad" or non existent, thought that social workers had no idea about the children's cultural needs or had little experience of rearing black children and therefore had no role to play. Some of their responses were: -

"Negative, because they come and they have no idea of their culture, they have no idea how to do their hair. They once asked me to teach another foster parent in Portmullin how to plait their hair and how to oil their skin"

"I don't think that social workers are keen on white people fostering these children. They don't seem to agree with it at all.... I had to report one social worker because she was doing everything in her power to have the parents remove their children away. I reported her and said that she was a racist and I didn't ever want to see her in my house. So she didn't come to me anymore"

The perception that social workers did not care about black children in private fostering arose from the frequency with which social workers visited foster carers. When foster carers only see social workers infrequently they believed that because these were private arrangements, social workers were not interested. These perceptions were conveyed in expressions such as: -

"Well, we do have problems because when you are private they do not always help you when you ask. We have continually asked them for help with Ben but social services said because he is privately fostered they've refused to help us for some reason or another"

> "We don't have any relationship with them with private fostering because they don't have anything to do with it. When foster children come to you, you have to fill out a form with the name and address and how old...They will come and visit you, see where they sleep, make sure that they are not sleeping in the garden shed, and that is it"

It does appear from the quotations that the degree of contact between the social workers and foster carers was a factor that determined the definition of the nature of their relationships.

One major thrust of local authority requirements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in private foster placements is the requirement to visit foster carers. It is the responsibility of each local authority to make arrangements for each child privately fostered in its area to be visited by an officer of the authority from time to time. In particular a social worker must visit: -

> "Within one week of the fostering arrangement beginning; thereafter at intervals of not more than six weeks during the first year; and in the second year, at intervals of no more than three months" (Regulation 3(1) (a) and (b).

Frequency of Visits: The data showed that 19% of the children were in placements for six months or less, six percent of others were in placements for between seven and twelve months. These children (25%) were supposed to have been visited by social workers at intervals of one and six weeks respectively at the time of this study.

Table 8.4. Frequency of Social workers' visit to foster carers.

Frequency of visits.	**Households**		**No of Children**	
	N.	%	N.	%
Every six weeks	7	23	14	20
Every three months	7	23	14	20
Every six months	7	23	19	28
Once a year	1	3	4	6
No fixed pattern	5	18	12	17
Over twelve months	3	10	6	9
TOTAL	**30**	**100**	**69**	**100**

Finding from the interviews showed that there were seven foster carers (23%) who were having visits at six weekly intervals.

There were 14 children in these households. Whereas there were 13 children (19%) in nine households whose placements demanded that they be visited at six-week intervals, only three children in two households were visited within the required guidelines. The remaining 10 children in seven households who should also have had visits at six-week intervals, were visited between three months and 12 months intervals. In seven other households (23%) with 14 children, the frequency of visits was three months. There were three children in this group who should also have been visited every 6 weeks but were not. In seven other households with 19 children, the frequency of visit was six months. There were three children in this group who were also expected to have visits at six- weekly interval. Only one foster carer said that she had visits once every 12 months and she had four children that qualified for six-weekly visits. Five foster carers were visited occasionally but they could not give a definite time frame. Even though they said that social workers visited them, they could not place their responses within any of the categories of intervals others had given or those prescribed by law.

Some of these were: -

> "Couple of months, three months, four months or whenever she can fit it in her schedule, because she said that she trusts me. She said that I am not one of them that take them in six to the dozen. I've said to her that I have often been tempted"

> "She doesn't have to visit me and she also knows that if I need her, I will phone her. I phone her anyway"

These responses also gave insights into the nature of relationships between some foster carers and the social workers supervising them. Many of the foster carers had known the worker prior to being assigned to supervise them and thus the frequent visits by the social workers prior to the arrival of the current social worker had given way to 'as and when the worker was around the area'. Three foster carers had not been visited for more than twelve months at the time of their interviews. Their responses were:-

> "I haven't had a visit for about 18 months now. So it is a bit naughty really, but I think they know who looks after the children well. You know that they really have to check, there are some that do need checks, really"

"Not for a very long time. I haven't seen a social worker for three years about private fostering because they said we can always ring them if we have any problems. I have no problems with him. Anyway what can they tell us about these children?

"They don't. They come only when you first have the children and well they don't come back. They wrote and asked me to go for a meeting but I couldn't go because I couldn't get there. So, no you don't really see them. For fostering that would be when Mary came, which is three years ago"

The picture that emerged from table 8.4 is that only in 46% were foster carers visited within the prescribed intervals. However that has to be judged against the fact that 10 out of 13 children who should have been visited every six weeks were not. In 54% of the sample, foster carers who had 41 children (i.e. about 60% of the children) had visits at intervals that fell short of the prescribed standard.

How Useful carers perceived visits.

In the opinions of the majority of the foster carers (53%) visits by social workers were very useful. Different reasons were given about how useful these visits were in fulfilling the following areas of need: -

i) Providing information = 7.

ii) Sorting out problems directly relating to the child = 5.

iii) Reassurance/Moral Support = 4.

When people started fostering through private arrangement, they found it very useful to know what was expected of them and what they needed to do as far as the law was concerned. Subsequent need for support from the social services was to help foster carers sort out problems directly relating to the children; For example, schools admissions, health and medical care or issues around dealing with birth parents or children who were not visited or contacted by parents for very long periods. The varieties of response attest to this the quotes below indicate.

"Well, I find it quite useful...Some times I've got something to ask and sometimes everything is plain sailing. Over this child, she never used to get any visits from her family and the social worker didn't agree with that. The child must be aware of its roots and traditions of her parentage and everything attached to coloured people that they pass on to their children. She said that if the didn't visit and didn't want the child, it would have to be taken into care

"Very useful because if I don't know anything I will ask her if I want to find out something and she doesn't she will find out for me and let me know. When they brought in all these new rules she said they were going to bring them out and I said can you find out for me what they are because I will need to know"

"Well, I'll like to know that someone is keeping in touch with me. Keeping a check on me because so many children are abused or people having them for the money and the children aren't looked after properly. I think that they should keep a check on us and I'm glad they do come round"

Fifty three per cent of the carers thought that visits were useful in so far as they helped them to clarify certain grey areas, sort out problems relating to the children directly, or reassured them that someone cared and would be available when the need arises. Forty three percent said that they did not find social workers' visits useful. These carers saw the visits as intruding into their affairs. Some carers perceived the visits as another way for social workers to try and "catch them out". They felt that since social workers knew very little about the children's culture and racial background there was little they could do by way of assistance with looking after them. Some of the views were expressed variously as:-

"I don't find them useful at all, not for the sake of the children. She will talk about how things are done here or have you done this or done that? It's like a friend coming round for a cup of coffee and saying oh you have done your loo now, oh you have done your bathroom. She is friendly don't get me wrong but she doesn't seem to have any worry regarding the children. So I don't find it useful at all"

"I don't find them useful in the least. As I said , I have had children dumped on my doorstep. I knew I was a widow. I was only getting my widow's allowance. they just did not want to know and didn't care how I fed the children and clothed them. I took them on and so it was up to me"

"None at all. All they come to find is your business. What you are doing, what children you have got. Apart from that, I have nothing to do with Social Services"

One respondent perceived social workers as people who could either be bad or friendly depending on what side they (social workers) wanted one to see or experience.

Her words were: -

> "I wouldn't say that I find the visits useful all the time. It can be annoying when there are allegations against you that have never happened; at other times it can be on quite a friendly basis. But you get two sides of a social worker. You can get the side that you want help with but at other times they go against you. But they don't see it our way the way we have to deal with the situation"

The one foster carer who stayed on the fence argued that it all depends on the social worker who is assigned to supervise the foster placements and their individuals work practices. Her words were:-

> Depends very much on the social worker. Some are very friendly and chatty and you feel you can sit and talk to them, while some are a bit sharp and abrupt and you don't feel you can sit and chat to them. So it does depend on the social worker that comes out to you"

Foster carers' perceptions of the usefulness of social worker visits did not however reflect their views about whether they thought it was necessary for social workers to visit them at all. More than two fifth of foster carers (83%) were in favour of visits. Ten percent (3 carers) were against while seven percent were ambivalent about whether social workers should visit.

The need to visit were seen by this 83% as necessary to ensure that children were properly looked after; that foster carers and the premises were suitable and if carers had any problems these could be sorted out by the social workers. On the other hand, the 10% who did not want visits argued that if parents visited or were in regular contact with their children, it was not necessary for social workers to visit. As one of them said, "I am not against them coming when they want to come but the parents come regularly and if there is any problems we can sort it out with them". Sixty eight per cent of those who favoured visits would prefer unannounced visits while 32% said they would like to be informed prior to visiting because the workers might come at a time when they were not in for one reason or another.

One respondent said: -

> "They should just come round but they always told us. We always knew when they were coming. Unlike the health visitor who used to just appear and if you were in the middle of cooking a meal or feeding the baby, they didn't mind. Well, that's how I think they should come and see you because otherwise you are naturally going to prepare for them"

The need to safeguard the child from harm was given insight by a respondent who said:-

> "I think for safety reasons the social worker or health visitor, whom I deal with a lot anyway, visits because not everybody does it for love and affection or whatever. Some children, I've seen it with my own eyes, can be abused by families. So to me that is a safety reason. Like the present worker, I still don't think the policeman should be doing the work. It needs someone who can drive round every six weeks visiting the families, by all means they should because that is safety reason for the child and also because they can check on that child not being abused"

One respondent who thought that the same standard of monitoring for childminding and day nurseries should also apply to private fostering also stated the need for stricter spot checks on foster carers. This respondent said: -

> "Yes, I think that social services should be the same for these coloured children as for white children. If there is any placement for white children anywhere, childminding or nursery, they are very strict. We are up on their rules. But they are not that strict on coloured children. No, I think they should be a lot more spot checks, I really do. Because then they would find the true colours of people. I mean its all right passing a person, they don't know them deep down after one visit. One visit is not enough really"

The need to visit regularly and unannounced by social workers was also spoken of by foster carers as a way of catching those who take in more than the legally permitted number of three children or more if exempted by the local authority. Two respondents while agreeing that social workers need to visit said: -

> "Yes, but not give notice that they are going to visit, just pop in. The do it to me and I would expect them to do it more regularly. It would stop a lot of these, and I am not pointing fingers, passing the kids on from one to another...Some have six because of the money. I think that is wrong. I think the unexpected visits from the social workers would help but social services are very slow".

> "There are the registered and also ones that aren't registered. Even among the registered there are a few of them who are registered for three children, but I've seen them have four or five children. When they know that the social worker is coming round, two or whatever number of these children will go missing into someone else's garden. So when they turn up they will only find the stipulated three children. It is people like that that are giving the genuine foster parents a bad name because they pass the children from one to another".

All these responses give one the impression that foster carers saw themselves as doing not only a good job of their fostering roles, but abiding by the law while others were not. Thus their overwhelming support for regular and unannounced visits by social workers as a way of protecting their spheres of influence and control from those judged to have the tendency to spoil things. This fear that others might spoil it for them had led to foster carers reporting other carers either to the Social Services or to birth parents. One respondent who had fostered privately for 35 years said that she has had to report other carers in her area to both social services and birth parents regarding the conditions under which children were being looked after. Her words were: -

> "They need to check that the child is looked after properly, not just there for the money venture because some of them do. I've seen where they have seven, eight, nine or ten children and they charge the parents up to £40 to £50 per week…but then you walk into that room, it stinks. There are no toys, nothing. That is what I have been trying to stop. I have reported two or three. But I have to be very careful because they trust me and I don't want that trust to fail. But I usually ring and tell the parents or the social services how the place is".

One area that never got mentioned frequently in foster carers' responses with regard to how they expected social workers to support them or intervene, was the financial aspect. Even though there was a general denial of financial motives for fostering, one could not help noticing that in some of the responses, foster carers indicated that others were "doing it for the money". But no one carer ever acknowledged doing it for the money. However when foster carers were asked about what roles they expected social workers to play in private fostering, interesting responses were received which were linked to money.

Three foster carers wanted the social workers to play the role of mediators; to assist them with sorting out their financial arrangements with birth parents. This is either when parents do not pay the agreed amount regularly or the social services should fix a minimum amount which parents should pay just as local authorities pay their foster carers.

These were variously put in the following ways: -

> "I think they should be there like, if you don't get the money from the parents because nobody today can afford to look after someone's child for nothing. If you are having trouble getting your money from the parents, they can help you sort it out through other social services where the parents live. We don't have to chase them up all the time"

> "They should support private fostering like money wise, to see that parents pay up and not abuse the people who are offering to look after their children. Some parents treat us like we are nobody and if we have somebody who will give us a little support to make them pay up and treat us with respect"

A respondent who wondered why social workers never showed the same enthusiasm when it came to dealing with private foster carers' financial problems summed these up. She wanted to know why…

> "…The social services don't do our money part. They do everything else to help, but when it comes to the actual money part, they don't want to know being private fostering, but they do with the council. I know that we don't do it for the money as such, we do it for the love, but also you do get a minimum fee…we say for instance £30, they say £10. But with council fostering you have a scale for the age of the child. It can go from £75. And I think we work hard, we do it because we love the children, but also we should still get the minimum fee".

Carers' Knowledge of the Children Act 1989.

Table 8.5. Carers' knowledge of the Children Act 1989.

	No	%
Very good	3	10
Little knowledge	12	40
None	15	50
TOTAL	30	100

Table 8.5 shows that half the sample (15) carers did not or were not aware of the Children's Act 1989 as the law dealing with private fostering. Forty percent said they knew very little about the law except that it allowed them to notify Social Services whenever they were taking children and that the same law allowed them to take in only three children. This same 40% also knew that it was the same law that said social workers should visit regularly. Ten percent said they had very good knowledge of the Children Act 1989.

One was a school governor and in that capacity has had to acquaint herself with the law relating to children. The other two became knowledgeable because they have been involved in legal disputes over children they fostered in the past.

The pervasive lack of knowledge or understanding of the law regarding private fostering among foster carers meant that they were not knowledgeable about social workers' statutory responsibilities towards them or the children they were fostering. This also limited the scope of support expected from the Social Services. Carers never mentioned training or guidance relating to the cultural, racial or linguistic needs of the children. This lack of training and guidance from the social services was further exacerbated by foster carers' perception that they know more than the social workers about the culture, race, skin and hair care and religious needs of these children. A good knowledge of the law relating to private fostering would enable them to know that safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in private foster care goes beyond guaranteeing just the physical care and the avoidance of harm to the child.

One might be tempted to suggest that the lack of extensive involvement of the Social Services in private fostering has led to foster carers' feeling of being abandoned by those meant to work closely with them in the interests of the children.

Another ramification of this lack of knowledge of the provision of the Children Act 1989 is played out in the notion of being registered. Ninety percent of the sample was of the opinion that being cleared to foster a child meant registration for them. Those foster carers some of whom had fostered for more than forty years, thought that they were registered foster carers whereas there is no provision in the law for local authorities to register private foster carers. This is information that social workers would routinely make available to foster carers when they visit or when training is organised for them.

Carers' Registration. Even though the law does not permit Local Authorities to register private foster carers, the local authorities have the power to prohibit a person from fostering privately; where in their opinion the person is not suitable; his/her premises are not suitable and/or neither the person nor the premises is suitable. Foster carers were asked whether they would want all private foster carers registered, and what benefit that would be to the practice of private fostering.

There was a 100% agreement on the need to register all private foster carers. Further probes revealed those foster carers' call for registration was anchored on three main concerns: -

i) The need to safeguard the child from harm;

ii) The need to give recognition to foster carers as well as maintain certain standards of care and;

iii) A safeguard against unscrupulous persons whose motives might not be wholesome.

iv) Birth parents would be reassured that whoever was looking after their child was recognised and sanctioned by the state, and finally

i) v) A general standard would not only be expected but foster carers would expect a uniform rate of pay as is the case with local authority fostering

The need to safeguard the child stemmed out of the feelings that a lot of placements were either unsuitable or that the social services did not always know about all the children in placement or those looking after them. The concerns were therefore to ensure that every child that was privately fostered went to a home where the authority would have cleared. Registration would also mean maintaining certain standards of care, which foster carers, would be expected to uphold with constant checks and monitoring. This was expected to ensure that whenever there was a violation of the standards registration could be revoked and a child or all children in the household

removed. Some of the reasons given for the need to register foster carers so as to safeguard the child were: -

> "Well, then the social services know where the children are, otherwise anybody could take them. People that have been turned down by the social services for fostering, they could go and foster privately, and well, who knows that they are like"

> "Because you don't know what home you are going to put that child into, do you? Hopefully going into a good home. You've got a good chance of a child going to a good home with a registered foster carer than with one who isn't. I think they should all be registered. Yes, I do"

> "It's really the safeguard of the child isn't it? They should be registered. People that don't register are doing it for the money, aren't they? They are not thinking about the child"

Carers perceived that registration would mean being issued with a certificate that can be shown to birth parents as a way of reassuring them that the prospective foster carer had official recognition. Thus where no certificate of registration was shown to the parents, they could refuse to place their child or go on to someone that was registered. Alternatively, parents could ring social services and request a list of registered private foster carers in the area. Some of the arguments to back these viewpoints were: -

> "So that social services know where these children are and at least the parents looking for foster know that these people have been checked out and have certificates to show them. It doesn't guarantee that they are all okay but you have some sort of back up that they have been checked out"

> "Well, to be quite honest, I know that this will not stop abuse of children but at least I can sit with my hand on my heart and tell the parents that I am registered and show them the proof of my registration to show that their child will be safe with me".

These quotations reiterate carers' general concern that a lot of children were placed without notifying the Social Services or children were placed with families who were judged by their peers as not doing it properly and thus seen to put the children at risk. What also became apparent was foster carers' perception that some of them were already registered while others were not and that even amongst those that were 'registered', unacceptable practices were going on. At least these were the messages from the following responses: -

"Well, I know some private foster carers that are registered and I don't think that they are at all suitable to have a cat in the house never mind about children. But they are registered"

"....But mind you even though they are registered, there is one here that escaped the net, no matter how we've reported the person, nothing gets done about it"

"Because we know that there are people who are fostering children who are not registered. Only the odd one or two and they are giving us a bad name"

Summary

The data showed that the main sources of support for foster carers' parenting tasks were their immediate or extended families, their friends or neighbours, doctors, birth parents, schools and other carers. No matter how or where the sample was obtained the extended family and friends or neighbours were the groups that provided the main childcare support to foster carers. Doctors or health visitors, birth parents also provided some forms of support to carers. Material assistance in the forms of items of clothing, pushchairs and car seats were obtained from other foster carers through their gathering called "coffee mornings".

Husbands were expected and indeed represented the father figures in the households as well as enforced discipline in some homes. They were the main source of the family's income and providers of emotional support to their wives.

The Social Services, which has statutory responsibilities to safeguard and promote the welfare of privately, fostered children featured very little as a source of support mentioned by foster carers. From the perspective of visits by social workers to the foster carers it showed that Social Services were not visiting within the required frequencies and standards.

On the usefulness of visits majority of the foster carers said that they found the visits useful and suggested that social workers should visit homes where children were privately fostered. In foster carers' views frequent visits would help safeguard the

children from abuse or enable social workers to check on how foster carers were bringing up the children. Thus frequent and unannounced visits by social workers would not only help check out on abuse of children in some families but keep foster families on their toes. The overwhelming role of the social workers as perceived by foster carers was to safeguard children from abuse or risks of abuse by foster families that were thought to be “doing it for the money" or "not registered". Even though finance was never given as a motive, a minority (10%) of the foster carers wanted to see the social workers playing the role of mediator between them and the birth parents regarding payments for looking after the children.

The Social Services departments were not perceived by carers to have much role in private fostering other than ensuring that children were not abused or put at risk of abuse by families who were in other carers' perception, “not fit to foster”. This restricted role of the Social Services as perceived by foster carers also stemmed from their lack of understanding the law that guide the practice of private fostering as half of the respondents had no knowledge of the Children's Act l989.

Finally there was a 100% agreement for the registration of private foster carers. These were anchored on the need to achieve the following objectives: -

i) Protect children from harm;

ii) Ensure a higher standard of childcare as a result of constant monitoring;

iii) Reassure parents that those they would be placing their children with have been officially sanctioned and can show proof of their registration and finally,

iv) This would help weed out those doing a bad job of their childrearing duties which has often tended to give private foster carers a bad name, in addition registration may ensure uniform rate of pay as is the case with local authority fostering.

CHAPTER NINE.

CULTURAL ISSUES:

This chapter discusses how foster carers have helped their private foster children keep in touch with their cultural, racial or ethnic backgrounds, and whether they thought that it was important for the children to know about these. It also examines how carers defined racism and/or how they have often helped the children overcome racist encounters in the community. Finally, foster carers' views or opinions about same race placements are discussed.

Culture as a concept is clearly important to a study of black children reared by white families. It is a major consideration of the way in which these children are reared and developed. The nature and importance of culture to a child, (any child) is the fact that, according to Nobles (1985) it is the process by which ---

> "---Symbolism, meanings, definitions, feelings, attitudes, values and behaviour are transmitted to each and every member of a group".

Within this perspective then, culture becomes an important aspect of self-awareness and the attachment of positive value to the self and the cultural definition of self. For West African children fostered through private arrangement and separated from black communities the issue becomes how cultural transmission becomes possible when measures are not taken to sustain racial and cultural identities. Ely and Denny (1987) argued that all children in care have a need to sustain their cultural identity but that this need was more profound for black children who are surrounded predominantly by white images. The requirements of the Children Act 1989 to consider a child's racial origins and culture and background underpin this reality.

The Significance of Culture to Black Children in Foster Care

Having noted that culture influences the goals parents have for their children and the methods they use to achieve those goals, the issue then was how care givers who were of different racial and cultural backgrounds could transmit these values through the child rearing practices they pursued. How can white foster carers understand better the needs of children whose cultural backgrounds differ from their own? To deal with these issues foster carers were asked how important they thought it was for their fostered children to know about their own culture and origins.

There was a 100% agreement that it is important for all the children to know about their cultural and racial origins. The need to know about their culture was argued by foster carers on the ground that the children would have to return to their parents eventually. If they had not known much about their origins or the culture of the people amongst whom they originated, the children were likely to be confused about who they were and where they belonged. The following quotes reflect foster carers' responses regarding the importance of the children becoming knowledgeable about their culture: -

> "Oh, I think every child should know where it comes from, it's own roots, it's history, every `child should know that"

> "I think it is nice for them to know about their background because when they get older they will want to know all about their past, their grandparents and how they do things"

> "Very important I think, especially if they are going to return home sometime in their lives. It will be a bit of a shock if they don't know anything about it at all"

While every child needed to know about it's own culture, foster carers felt that only when the child was old enough to know and understand would they want to teach or tell them. Twenty per cent of foster carers thought that it was up to the grown- up children whether they wanted to know more about their culture. Thirty seven percent said it depended on whether these were the birth parents' wishes, while 43% said that they would take steps to enable the child to know about its culture and origin anyway. But how they attempted to achieve these was another matter altogether.

First of all, foster carers had very little understanding of West African people, their ways of life and the multitudes of tribes and languages that exist in West Africa in general and in Nigeria in particular where all of the children's parents came from. Notwithstanding how long foster carers have been fostering West African children, no one among them could identify the tribes from which the children came. They neither understood meanings of the children's African names or the significance of family names to most West African tribes.

What carers said they did to help children keep in touch with their own culture.

Table 9.1 what carers said they did to help children keep in touch with their culture.

	N	%
Teach them anything I know from books or personal experience	10	33
Leave it to parents	7	23
Do what parents request	6	20
Take them to meet other black people in the community	2	7
Do nothing because I don't know	5	17
TOTAL	**30**	**100**

As table 9.1 shows, 33 per cent said that they relied on whatever knowledge they had acquired from books or other personal experiences about Black people in general or Africans in particular to help their foster children keep in touch with their culture. Twenty three percent said that it depended on what the birth parents wanted them to do about cultural issues. Another 23 percent said that it was the responsibility of the parents to teach the children since they had regular contact and also because carers did not know what parents wanted. Two carers said that the children kept in touch with their culture through meeting with other Black people in the community where they lived. These were however people of Caribbean descend and not West Africans. A further

17% said they were doing nothing to help the children keep in touch with their own culture because they (carers) did not know anything about the culture.

It is interesting to note that none of the eight carers who met fortnightly mentioned the fact that the children also used the forums to meet with other black children who may also have come from the same tribes.

We know from Chapter Seven that parents expected foster carers to observe some religious practices, but how much understanding foster carers had about why they had to do that is very much in doubt. As put by some respondents: -

> "None of the parents have actually said that they want the child to read this book or learn this or to watch that on television. I have never had that. I think maybe mainly because they do go home. They go to their church and their own way of life. So maybe that's why I haven't done anything. I have been asked to put a Bible under the mattresses at times but parents do not always tell us why. Even when you ask they sort of look at you as if to sort of say why?"

> "I go to church with them while they are with me. We've all got a bible under our pillows, because that is the culture...sometimes I put mine to one side because it nearly killed me, but I put it back under before they come into my bedroom"

The regularity with which children were in contact with their parents most especially when they went home on weekends or during school holidays was seen as providing avenues where children could acquire knowledge about their culture from their birth parents. This was the view of 23 percent of foster carers some of whom said: -

> "I don't need to do anything more at the moment because his parents do when he goes home. I don't know a lot about his culture anyway, and it is not something his mother discusses with us a lot. So he gets it when he goes home"

> "Well, there's not a lot we can do only when they go home. Food wise we know they cannot have pork but the church side of it is when they go home. We are Church of England, we only go to church weddings and funerals, but their parents go to pray all weekends and we cant give that to them here"

Five foster carers said they did nothing because they did not know much about the children's culture or that parents did not ask them to do anything in particular.

These quotes show that foster carers' understanding of what constituted culture and what the foster children needed to know were very narrow. They perceived culture in terms of what food children's parents eat or what religious practice parents observed and the clothes they wear.

There was no understanding of the languages, why certain names are given to children and the importance of family names to one's identity and place in society. Although there was a 100% score on the need for these children to learn and know about their culture, foster carers scored very low in their knowledge of the children's culture. Thus by implication they did not have much to inculcate into the children to enable them develop strong racial, ethnic, linguistic and religious identities.

Much of the debate about transracial fostering has centred on whether white foster families would provide the child with adequate safeguards to enable it to acquire appropriate racial identity. The argument is that a same race placement carries with it the better chance of all round success for a black child, including the development of a positive identity. Since parents are the primary role models for children and if these models are to be incorporated by children, they need to identify themselves as being like their parents.

The need for all children to learn about the culture of their family of origin can only be achieved when families with whom the children are placed can enable the children to experience the richness of black family life and to come to be proud of and value their heritage. This could not be said of these families given the racial differences between them and the almost total ignorance by foster carers about West African people and their culture. Therefore despite what may be very positive attitudes from carers, black children growing up in white families risk growing up in a cultural "no-man's-land", feeling white, knowing how to live as a white person, while being obviously black to the outside world. However, given the multiplicity of West African cultures, advocating a same race placement for a West African child would still be riddled by the same problem of finding a family from the same country or ethnic group that may not be available. For example the placement of a Yoruba child with a Ghanaian family even though from West Africa, cannot provide the cultural and ethnic needs of that child because the cultural practices and norms may not be the same.

Even in Nigeria, an Igbo or Hausa family may not know enough about the Yoruba cultures from where most of the children came, to be able to provide appropriate cultural training. At the level of empathising with the child and helping the child overcome or deal with racism, the advantage that a Black West African or African-Caribbean family fostering a Nigerian child will have over a white family also fostering a black child will be in the shared experiences of racism and how to cope with it.

To that extent therefore these placements could not be described meeting the cultural needs of the children because the foster carers lacked an understanding of the variations that exist within culture and its role in providing strength, connectedness and a sense of identity. This further gives room for concern as 30 percent of the carers said that some of the children they were fostering or had fostered in the past have shown negative attitudes towards black people or have expressed a desire to be white. Respondents said that they had seen children in and around their communities who…

> "…Keep scrubbing their faces and hope white will show. They think Nigeria is a jungle and they are scared to go back there"

Or

> "…It was when she was about six or seven years old. Oh yes, two occasions I've had that. I had one who came in to me and said she wanted to be white, so she tried to scrub herself white. Where she'd been before she came here I don't know. But I managed to bring her round to knowing she was black"

> "As the years have gone by Orji now knows that he is black. He got to the stage where he kept saying; oh I'd like to be white. But I compensated that by giving him a lot of love and understanding and he now knows that he is black"

But whether these were indicative of a general negative attitude toward black people or particularly only toward their birth parents is not clear. Be it a particular resentment toward their parents or generally toward black people, foster carers have often attempted to help the children overcome these by, as some of them would say, "showing them love and understanding", "sit and cuddle them", "tell them to be proud of their colour".

It could be the case that those children, most of who were fostered within weeks or months of being born, would have become isolated from the black community and therefore showed no enthusiasm to feel and act black. The perception of the child as fully settled in or integrated into the foster carer's family might be interpreted as rejecting their own origins or background. Having been brought up as part of the family also demands becoming everything like other members of the family both in manners, values and attitudes. However the impediment to a complete transformation remained the skin colour. It is no wonder that some of the children wanted to scrub off their blackness so as to come to resemble their foster carers even in skin colour.

Gill and Jackson (1983) and Tizard and Phoenix, (1989) have expressed concerns about how successfully young black children brought up in predominantly white environments and who having been brought up largely as if they are white, will manage the transition into independent adulthood in a society that is racist.

Children's Experiences of Racism. When foster carers were asked whether the children they were fostering had experienced any form of racism, 60% said "yes" and 40% said "no". These experiences were either in schools and playgrounds or when the foster carers took the children out for shopping. Racism, to foster carers, meant calling other minority non-white people derogatory names, discriminating against them because of their colour of skin or being nasty to someone simply because they are non-whites. With regard to their foster children foster carers' concerns about racism was the derogatory name-calling such as "nigger", "Pakie", which black children are subjected to in schools and parks or playgrounds. At the level of adult experiences, racism was any antagonism shown towards people on the basis of their race or colour was perceived as racism.

Against the background that these people were living in rural areas that had little or no settled black population, the children would have been isolated with no black

models to look up to. Even though the children had contacts with their parents, these contacts were not avenues to discuss what emotional or traumatic experiences the children would have encountered. For foster carers to have acknowledged difficulties, they would also have effectively been saying that the placements were not succeeding, and would also be accepting their inability to parent or look after these children. Nowhere in the accounts given by foster carers about the issues they discussed when parents visited, were the issues about how children had experienced racism mentioned. When asked how they helped the children to overcome these negative experiences, 72 percent said that they told the children to ignore such taunts because it did not matter what other children said about their skin, underneath they (children) were all the same.

It is actions like these and their inappropriateness that opponents of trans- racial fostering or adoption have often said, made white families not able to deal with problems of racism in society (Chistang, 1972, Mullender and Miller, 1985, Samuels, 1979,). The reality of the British society today for the black child is the constant reminder of their image as black and inferior in a society where white culture and white values dominate. Therefore to tell a black child who experiences racism in school or at playgrounds that his being called a "nigger" or "dark chocolate" means nothing, is to further confuse the child as to who he/she really is or why other children call him/her such names; moreover as some of them had started “scrubbing their blackness off” hoping that white will appear. Loving though these foster carers would have been, however love nourishes but does not protect a black child from facing the reality of the racism he/she will encounter, as some of these foster carers would have discovered.

All 30 foster carers however acknowledged that racism was endemic and a serious problem in the United Kingdom. The notion of a serious problem of racism in the country was however something that was far removed from their communities as foster carers saw racism as mainly an urban problem. Television and newspaper headlines tended to externalise the problem from the rural communities as foster carers

come to define racism as struggles over jobs, housing and positions in public institutions. This tendency to externalise the incidence of racism meant those foster children's experiences of racist insults and bullying were often passed off as minor incidents perpetuated by ignorant adults or children in the community and of little significance.

To judge foster carers' views about multiculturalism in our society, they were asked whether it was important to recognise other people's way of life while they are in the United Kingdom. An overwhelming majority (93%) thought that it was important for people to recognise and appreciate other cultures who live amongst them as well. Seven percent did not think that people should cling on to their identities when they have immigrated to the United Kingdom. A respondent who was in her mid 50's and fostering three black children said: -

> "It is not important to have people come here and want to be different. They shouldn't separate themselves but do what we do too"

Another respondent answering the same question said: -

> "I don't think so. I think when they are here they should all mingle in with the English and they like burgers and what have you. They all go in for all this English stuff don't they?"

Those who said that it was important to recognise other people's culture while they are in this country anchored their responses on the need for people to live together as one race and the need also to learn about other cultures and races. Some of these responses were: -

"Yes, because we all have to live in this world together. It's the same with Pakistanis, they have got their own culture and we've got ours. But we are all on this planet to survive...So everyone knows everyone's culture - then there wouldn't be any name -calling to people who wear turbans on their heads. That is their culture...So if we all know one each other's culture, I think it would be better".

"I think so, yes...because everybody should live together in harmony. But there are the ignorant few who would look down on other cultures whether Chinese, Indian or Black. I think we should start it in the schools for the children to know about other people and how they live"

"I think it is important to know about other cultures because there is not enough known about other people's culture. You know, they way they are brought up and everything. I think they should know how other people do things in their culture like you know"

However, did this need to recognise other people's culture also translate into the awareness for people of similar racial or cultural background to foster children of the same race or culture? Having also overwhelming said that it was very important for the child to keep in touch with its own culture and background what would carers' attitudes or views be regarding suggestions for same race placements as advocated by BAAF and others, and now practised by some local authorities?

Carers' Views on Same Race Placements.

Foster carers in response to why they thought it was important for the child to keep in touch with his/her culture and family of origin were based on the thinking that the child would return to its birth parents in the future.

A majority of carers (63%) was against any policy that would mean that only black families should foster black children and white families to foster white children. We do not know whether birth parents would be in favour of a same race policy given that they are known to place their wards in English counties so that the children would acquire English values and mannerisms. A same race policy would compromise these objectives and whatever the birth parents expect their children to gain from these transracial placements. In the absence of any data to confirm this, it has to remain in the realm of educated speculations. Twenty percent of the carers were in favour of same-race placements while 17% were ambivalent about the issue. Those who were in favour of same-race placements based their responses on the need for the children to grow up in a culturally similar environment and with people who would be able to provide positive model figures. These foster carers said that it means that those looking after the children would not have to learn as much about how things are done in that culture, as white foster carers now attempt to learn about the black children they foster.

Since the foster families were unable to provide some culturally relevant education or socialisation, some of them argued that it was preferable for black families to foster black children because these families would be able to provide the necessary guidance to enable the children acquire appropriate survival skills and techniques. However, they also argued that no white families should be denied the chance to provide a loving home environment to a black child purely on the basis of colour. As one respondent put it: -

> "...If they wanted their child to follow a certain way or religion that they practice at home and I couldn't provide that but only a black family could, then yes I can understand. But purely for the colour, no...if it was for the child's benefit for certain religious things or something I couldn't do for them maybe I could understand that but other than that - no".

One respondent was of the opinion that if the child were to remain in his/her environment, then that would be a good enough reason for same-race placements. She said: -

> "I would agree on that really. At least the child will still be in his own culture, with his own colour and everything; oh no, I do agree on that for this good reason and regarding the circumstances behind it. You could be sure that the child would be brought up in its own culture and knowing about his background".

Those who were against same-race placements, argued that all that mattered was "love" and the fact that all humans should be seen as the same no matter what colour. There were others amongst this group who felt that there were no black foster carers willing to foster the children and even gave instances where black children placed with black foster carers were treated badly or abused. In the words of one respondent: -

> "I find that if they put them with their own colour they are treated very badly. Like these two with me now, this was someone of their own colour and they were treated very badly".

The paramouncy of love over other considerations of the needs of a black child tended to be very pervasive in the thinking and responses of those who were against same-race placements. These permeated a lot of their responses and were demonstrated by the following quotes: -

> "I don't actually really think it matters as long as a child is loved and has security and the person who is looking after them does not bring them up as white children. I think that is was people are moaning about that some white people bring their black children up as white so that the little things don't realise that they are black".

> "No, I don't agree, I think it is where they are wanted, loved and looked after that is more important. I don't think it is important what colour, we are all the same. It is important that they are looked after and loved; it's not whether they have the same colour of faces".
>
> "I don't like that because it is prejudice, just because you are brown doesn't meant that you can't look after a white child does it...No, it doesn't, we can bring up black children. I don't like this business of giving blacks to blacks and whites to whites. That is really called prejudice as far as I'm concerned".

Of course it is understandable that white foster carers who look after black children would reject any suggestion to deny them taking any more black children into their households. These children have very often enabled them to fulfil their wishes to look after "babies" or start another family, their own children having grown and moved on to establish their own families or have refused to foster for the local authority because of the troubled background of the children. As noted in chapter five, the love of "babies" was the main motivation to foster. This need or love of "babies", we also found, was predicated on the fact that it made things easier for carers to mould the children the way they wanted and knew how. Methods which many of them have practised with their own children and found successful.

In the words of a respondent when asked at what age she most enjoyed children, she said: -

> "I love tiny babies. I like younger children because I suppose I can mould them into my ways."

One respondent summed up the views of most foster carers in this category when she said: -

> "I like babies. I like them when they are newly born, when we have them six or eight weeks old. Don't ask my why. I think it is because they are so helpless and they depend on you and then from that age you are watching them grow from that newborn age to sitting down. It's first smile, it's first words, trying to climb out of a cot; the joy of their first words or steps. That kind of thing gives me absolute pleasure"

Views such as have been quoted above explain why a majority of the foster carers in the study were opposed to the suggestion of a policy of same-race placements or adoption.

However loving though many of them would have been toward their foster children, many foster carers were ill equipped to meet the needs of their foster children as far as these children's cultural, linguistic and religious needs were concerned.

Adopting a "colour-blind" approach to nurturing their foster children meant that the children would not have learnt the skills necessary for their survival in a white racist society (Pennie and Williams, 1987). The argument is that these children will not forever remain in the embraces of their foster carers when they grow up. Having not been equipped with strategies to deal with racism, the children would not only become estranged from their parent's culture, but will not also fit into the dominant culture. Although it will be foolhardy to expect foster carers to have a professional awareness about the culture of the children or about racism, they should be able to acknowledge the pervasive nature of racism in the UK and be able to challenge it at all levels and thus help their foster children cope with that when growing up.

The chosen course of action was however to deny the importance of cultural diversity skins colour and its significance for the children's confirmation of their likely experiences. Failure to do this thus left the children unprepared to understand and deal with these when they finally return to their birth parents and into the wider community.

Although there is an extensive body of research into matters which are relevant to the placement of black and ethnic minority children (Caesar, Parchment and Berridge, 1994) these have mainly been in the area of official fostering or adoption. Even then, reliable data on the long-term outcome of transracial placements, according to Smith and Berridge (1993), are not available. We do not have data about how many of the children that were fostered in the 1960s and 70s and have since returned to their birth parents are coping with or how to deal with racism in the wider British society; neither do we have data about how these children have made the transition from a wholly white upbringing into finding their identities as young black adults back in West Africa or in the wider British society.

Summary

This chapter has shown that all foster carers in the study agreed that it was imperative for their foster children to keep in touch with their culture and origins. However, it was also shown that foster carers knew very little or nothing at all about the linguistic, religious or tribal backgrounds of the children. This lack of knowledge meant that foster carers were unable to provide appropriate cultural stimulation to enable the children to acquire these characteristics. Foster carers tried to overcome these by whatever information they could find from books about Africa, Nigeria or black people and sometimes were supplemented by television programmes on black issues. Others saw it as the responsibility of birth parents to impart cultural education or information to their children or carers would whatever parents wanted them to do about those aspects of the children's needs. Some others did nothing because they did not know what to do, while others obtained or gained the information from other carers. No carer had sought the assistance of the Social Services presumably because of the perception that social workers who could have given them advice or guidance knew little about the child rearing practices of West Africans. Thus the need for children to keep in touch with their culture and communities of people with similar background was thwarted by the colour blind approached adopted by some foster carers in their parenting tasks. Their inability or unwillingness to recognise and deal with the racial differences between them and the children showed in their responses to children's experiences of racism. Children were told to ignore racist name-calling or slurs and told that beneath their skin they were all the same. Added to this was their overwhelming rejection of the suggestion for same race placements. To foster carers, love and the security of a loving home were more important than the colour of the caregiver.

However, parenting involves more than loving, and providing food and shelter. Parents have a role as educators, standard setters, and disciplinarians and young children

inevitably come to imbibe things from regard those who care for them. The relevance of this to West African children in private foster care is that they are aspiring to the standards of their white foster carers with whom they cannot entirely identify, yet have very little avenues to acquire more because they are often in isolated rural areas. Almost all authority figures are certain to be white.

However it is also very important to recognise the care, commitment and love which many white families have provided (and are still doing so) to their black West African foster children. Many private foster carers in the study were people who enjoyed looking after their West African children and would do so even if birth parents did not pay them.

However specific knowledge and understanding of the ethnic origins and cultural needs of individual children and how to deal with the issues when they occur, did not match their commitment and enthusiasm, given the pervasiveness of racism in British society today.

CHAPTER TEN

THEMES AND CONCLUSIONS:

This study started with the dual objectives of examining the practice of placing West African children in foster care through private arrangements and the policy and practice procedures for dealing with private fostering among local authorities. It is more than a decade since the enactment of the Children Act 1989, and nearly a decade since its implementation. Can we say that the local authorities are "satisfying themselves that the welfare of children who are privately fostered in their areas is safeguarded and promoted"? Evidence from the study will be summarised in order to examine the specific themes of private fostering that the work has addressed. This final chapter will also discuss the policy and practice implications of these findings and put forward proposals for change and future research in this area.

1. <u>Characteristics of the Placements</u>:

ii) Notification: The Children Act 1989 provides that a party to a private fostering arrangement must inform the local authority Social Services Department in whose area the child is intended to be placed six weeks prior to the arrival of the child; or within 48 hours if the child was placed in an emergency (the onus being on both birth and foster parents or a third party who knows about such placements to notify). This provides the Local Authority with the time to fulfil the legal requirements to assess the carers and their premises. However, an under-reporting of placements was a feature of private fostering placements in the areas studied. None of the foster carers complied with these requirements. The high level of under-reporting of placements was not as a result of carers' lack of knowledge about the requirements (all carers knew that they

were expected to notify the Social Services Department of any private fostering placement), but because of ignorance about the reasons and benefits of notification and the likely penalties for failing to do so. It was also because of carers' perception that being a private arrangement, there was little or no role for Social Services. The situation was further exacerbated by the lack of information and publicity by the local authorities of the consequences of non-notification. The penalties had no 'teeth' as no carer had been penalised.

The effect of this was that children could come and go without the knowledge of the Social Services Department as foster carers took in children on a trial basis, only told SSD when they were discovered, or after several months when they had decided to keep the children.

This finding replicates that of Holman (1973), (although at the time of Holman's study there was no requirement for parents to notify in advance, or for foster carers to notify if they had done so on a previous occasion), the SSI Inspection of Private Fostering (1994) and Save the Children (1997). But while both the SS1 (1994) inspection and the Save the Children (1997) suggested that local authorities should give further attention to publicity and information about private fostering, I believe that these alone cannot guarantee higher rates of notification. As has been shown, carers who knew about the requirements to notify did not do so because of the perception that Social Services Departments had no role in private placements. Other incentives would be necessary if these perceptions are to be changed.

Social Services Departments need to demonstrate to carers that they are working towards the general welfare of the children and have something to offer them rather than against private fostering. This will be discussed in the suggestions for change later in the chapter.

Under-notification of placements, both by birth parents and foster carers had implications for the general duties of the local authorities toward children that were privately fostered in their areas in such areas as: -

- Assessment of foster carers.

When there is under-notification, it means that not every carer or placement would be assessed and by implication the service will be unable to determine the placement needs of both child and carer.

- Visits to foster carers and children

The findings showed that social workers did not visit as and when required by legislation or the Guidance and Regulations to the Children Act 1989. The study found that there were children who were not visited for 12 months after their placements, even though the Social Services had been informed of their presence. It emerged that social workers visited only when they could fit time in their schedules and not as a matter of legal requirements. The consequence of this was that West African children were living away from their families with strangers - some of whom had not been vetted – without proper planning or pre-placement investigations by the Social Services Departments.

- Imposition of requirements on placements- the consequence or result of the two factors of under-notification and visiting was that no requirements were ever imposed on any carer, even though some of them were clearly not meeting the needs of the children.

ii) **The Foster Children**: Previous studies (Holman, 1973, SS1, 1994, and Save the Children, 1997) have noted the unacceptable manner in which West African Children were placed in private foster care, and this study has identified particular concerns in the following areas:

a) <u>Trans-racial placements</u> - All the placements were transracial and many were in white rural areas where children have little or no access to their own

community and culture. Children found their foster homes via advertisements or through informal networks accessed by their parents, and with no system of follow-up or safeguards.

b) Age at placement and the nature of placement- Children were placed at very young ages. There was a high proportion of the under-five age group at the time of their placements. This study found that 56% of the children were placed within 24 months of birth. More importantly 45% were placed within six months of birth. From a developmental point of view, these early years have a vital influence on children's social, emotional, physical and intellectual development. Moreover, this study has shown that children were placed without adequate preparations and at short notices, such that carers did not have time to get to know each child before placement.

This manner of placement seemed similar to the way children in the public care system are sometimes placed as well. Children in the public care system are usually removed from home because families suddenly get into crises and children need to be removed to a place of safety either temporarily or on a long-term basis. This lack of preparation for placement of children in the private fostering domain was shown during the pilot to be associated with frequent movement of children from one carer to another sometimes without approval from the birth parents. Being private arrangements, one would have expected parents to make adequate preparations for the best placements for their children. However, placements of children in this study were not based on clear and enforceable agreement on the purpose and duration, neither was information given to foster carers by the birth parents about the children's health, dietary habits, health or medical histories. Though the children were placed in these circumstances, but unlike the findings by Holman (l973), SSl (l994) and Save the Children (l997), there was a high degree of contact between the children and their birth parents. Not only did children have consistent and useful contact with birth parents that were resident in the United Kingdom birth parents resident abroad also had consistent and frequent contact

with their children through various means. One other area of the finding that differs from past research was in the area of duration of placements.

Possibly due to sample bias, a large number of the placements were stable and 44 percent of the placements had lasted for five years or more at the time of the study. This situation may have been aided by the frequency of contact between the children and their birth parents or because children were placed early at birth and would have grown up knowing and forming close attachments with their foster carers.

Having said that however, it is important that attention be paid to the quality of care given to this group of children most of who were separated from their own families before the age of five. Given the manner, through which these children were received into foster care and the findings that a majority of the placements were not notified to local authorities, the concerns are that the children would not be getting a high standard of care. The perceived wisdom would be to argue that since birth parents have regular contact they are in the position to exercise their parental responsibility and have an over view of the welfare of their children. However different standards both in child care values held by birth parents and foster carers may lead to conflict, which may affect the child negatively as to affect the child's general welfare and development. This was observed in the area of discipline and the age at which both birth parents and foster carers expected the child to assume certain roles and responsibilities; for example older children caring for their younger siblings when they visited their birth parents at weekends or during school holidays.

iii) The Foster Carers:

Most media and anecdotal evidence about private foster carers has tended to accuse them of fostering for the money, and to represent them as unsuitable people who had been rejected as local authority foster carers; and who had a tendency to take in large numbers of children (Woollard, 1991, Francis 1986 and Atkinson and Horner, 1990). Holman (1973) and Save the Children (1997) presented characteristics of private

foster carers in their research. They found that women who care for private foster children seemed in many ways like any other foster parents. However, these studies showed that private foster carers were almost all approaching middle life, had children of their own and lived almost exclusively in public housing. Several of them were unemployed and predominantly from the low-income ranges. Although carers had experience of bringing up their children, they seemed to have a very limited experience of parenthood and did not seem to go beyond seeing it as providing shelter, food and clothing. The general level of insensitivity (at best) of private foster carers to the issue of race, culture, language and religion of the West African children was noted by these studies.

While many of these characteristics were repeatedly found in this study, there were other findings, which tend to challenge those earlier findings. Firstly, when carers were asked about their motivation for fostering privately, no carer indicated that they were motivated by financial gains. Most appeared motivated by an altruistic wish to help unfortunate children or the love of "**babies**". Secondly, they were motivated by a desire to extend their families or start a new one, having brought up their own children who had since established their own families. However, this love for children and the desire to start a new family were also found to be reasons for their failing adequately to cater for the needs of the children. Carers expected to fulfil their parental tasks by adopting styles and approaches they had used to bring up their own children in the past. But because of the transracial nature of the placements, the implications of this method of parenting to the children acquiring their cultural, linguistic and religious identities are clear for all to see; especially given the lack of knowledge by the foster carers, and inadequate support from Social workers.

The second significant finding of this study in terms of the characteristics was that only three out of 14 carers who had applied to foster for the local authority had been turned down. Unlike the perception given by past studies, many of the carers in this study had

not been rejected as local authority foster carers. Whether this implies biases in their samples or the sample for this study cannot be ascertained at the moment.

A further issue of concern related to the age of the carers. A majority of the carers were well into their sixties and many said that they were struggling with the physical side of caring for those children of school age. As for the educational needs of the children, the foster carers were not in the position to help with schoolwork especially as most of them (77%) only had some secondary education many decades ago. It is ironic that while birth parents desire good education for their children by placing them in rural areas, they then place these children with carers whose academic abilities do not seem to equate with those of the birth parents.

Loving though many carers seem to have been toward their foster children, many of them had difficulties providing for the cultural and racial needs of the children. This showed in carers' tendency to ignore the racial origin of the children by adopting colour-blind approaches to their parenting; or their attempts to deny the pervasiveness of racism in the British society. However this did not prevent the stability of family life that many children in the study had, and the fact that many of the placements lasted longer than other studies have found for local authority foster placements.

2. <u>OTHER INTERESTING NEW FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY</u>.

The new evidence that has emerged from this study centres on the following areas:

i) No new private foster carers coming forward- it appears that over the years a group of people of roughly the same age range has consistently remained the core group of people fostering either through private arrangements. This is indicated by the fact that 86 percent of the carers in this study had been fostering West African children for between 11 and 31 years. The longest being 42 years while the shortest was 2 years. On reflection however, three reasons may be advanced for the predominance of

the middle-aged carers in private fostering. Firstly, it may be the case that younger women may still be nurturing their own birth children and therefore would not want to take on extra responsibilities for nurturing other people's children. On the other hand, middle aged women who have passed their child bearing ages would have the time to take in children to fill the empty nests left by their departing or departed children. This is indicated by carers' need to foster "babies" rather than older children. Secondly, since carers and birth parents find one another through informal networks, knowledge about the availability of children and carers may be restricted to those few in the network. Since names are passed from friends to friends and relations, this may be the reason why there seemed to be the same core group that foster (this was also shown in places where carers said that their own parents had fostered in the past).

Thirdly, the respect accorded to elders with regard to childrearing in West Africa might explain birth parents' choice of more elderly women to look after their children, since they would have given their children with grand parents (if they were in West Africa) who would also of similar ages to the foster carers. There are also difficulties in recruiting and retaining foster carers both in the public spheres. Demographic changes have meant that far fewer people fit the traditional profile of foster carers- a two-parent family with only one wage earner. There are now alternative options for those interested in caring for children, especially with the proliferation of private-agency fostering organisations. In addition to these, there are now more women in paid employment than men (Warren, 1997). This has led authorities to widen the range of people they appeal to as potential carers, but which has still left many authorities struggling to recruit the carers they need to ensure a high-quality public foster care services. Therefore with few new entrants taking up fostering in general, and private fostering in particular, this study is tempted to argue that not only will the standard and quality of care children receive deteriorate, parents seeking places for their children may be faced with decreasing carer population and limited choices. Maybe ultimately placing such children with unsuitable

people or families who, according to some foster carers, "are not fit to care for a cat". The consequence of this is likely to be a situation where children are placed with quite elderly women who may be in need of emotional support themselves and who may use the children to fulfil this, but becoming “devastated”, “heartbroken”, and “suicidal” when children are removed by birth parents. Past studies have given little attention to such issues as the emotional need of elderly foster carers who may be continuing to foster babies in order to fulfil the need for emotional support that the presence of these children would provide. As no new people come forward to foster and current foster carers grow older, a time may come when many loving people needing to foster cannot cope with the physical demands of looking after school age children, and as a result, provide low quality care to these children. Whether this will be a general trend in the private fostering field or it was just a chance occurrence, cannot be concluded from this small sample.

ii) **Differing concepts of parenting and discipline-**

There was a perception among carers that they could go on doing the best they could for the children in terms of providing love and physical care and hope that the children could acquire appropriate values and identities. The desires to nurture children who would come to resemble them in everything but skin colour, was the determining factor in the parenting styles. This desire to have children whom carers wanted to mould to their own image was aided by the fact that birth parents were ready to part with their children early after birth and to convey the impressions to carers that the children were given to them (carers) for good. Without any defined and enforceable agreement on the purpose and duration of the placements, the placements in this study were found to be in such a manner that children's welfare as defined by their acquiring appropriate cultural, linguistic and religious identities, was at risk of being compromised.

Nowhere is this conflict of parental styles between West African parents and their English foster carers' counterparts more evident than in the area of discipline. Whereas in West Africa most disciplines are the responsibility of the men and would have been the case in children's birth families, in this study by contrast, women said they administered discipline. Seventy three percent of the female carers were solely responsible for discipline. While the West African parent would use physical punishment as the predominant form of punishment, carers said they used alternative methods such as "grounding" or "telling off". The consequence of this was the conflict created when children went home to birth parents and were punished through physical means. This is an area that has the potential to be very explosive, especially in the current climate of concern about child abuse. In an ideal situation, both parties should be able to define and agree on these issues with the help of a social worker as part of the general agreement for the purpose and duration of placement at the time of placements.

Another area of conflict or confusion for these children is when they return home to their birth parents, having been brought up in households where the female had been the dominant authority figure and to find that their mothers treat their husbands as lords and possess little authority in the home. With little knowledge of the cultural practices and role obligations, the child might become confused and disorientated about appropriate behaviour or where power and authority lies within the family as opposed to the situation in the foster family. It is also one in which little has been done to draw attention to the potential of social workers' involvement acting as the disinterested, honest broker to help the parties clarify how the range of parenting tasks will be carried out and reach fair agreement. Social work activities in this situation is one that should concentrate on enabling birth parents and carers to agree on what they expect from each other regarding this area of parenting. Such activities should aim to promote the well being of the child and to guarantee his/her rights under the Children Act 1989 and the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989.

iii) Lack of Control, Freedom of choice and Uncertainty:

This study found (like many others before it), that private fostering is bereft of any measure of meaningful control and supervision. As past sections of the study have shown, this has the potential seriously to compromise the welfare of the children placed. Top of these is the explanation by foster carers that not enough notice was usually given by birth parents before the children were placed. Most important however was the finding that even when foster carers did notify the authorities, hardly anything was done by Social Services to generally satisfy themselves as to the suitability of the carers or the purpose and duration of these placements. The inability of the law to define what constitutes an emergency placement has added to the uncertainty regarding what actions to take when carers say that the child was placed in a hurry.

Lack of notification then means that the Social Services did not know the total number of children privately fostered in their areas. In some instances, children who were thought to be in particular households were discovered to have either gone back to their parents or moved on another carer, and some other children since taken in by the foster carer without notifying the SSD. Thus foster carers could pick and choose which children they took in and how many, since there was little or no supervision or monitoring. Carers' freedom of choice was exhibited in their preference for 'babies, and they rarely fostered any child after their second birthday.

Uncertainty emerged on the part of foster carers about both the purpose and the duration of placements that they had arranged. This was seen to arise from the usually haphazard manner of the placements. Children's route to placements began either with a telephone call from a birth parent to a prospective carer or advertisement in the local papers. When contacts are made, parents usually bring the child into the foster family two or three days later without preparing the child for eventual introduction to their new families. Usually fees are agreed but no documents are written or signed in the form of

enforceable agreement. The child is left with total strangers who are usually not given enough information and details about the child. Children are given and taken on trust between birth parents and foster parents.

Placed in this way, many West African children are brought up in white English families, in rural areas without much contact with similar racial or cultural communities to those of their origins except the contacts with their birth parents as described in previous chapters. Carers' uncertainty is also heightened by their not knowing when the birth parents would request the return of the children.

Almost three decades after Holman's study and almost a decade after the integration of private fostering into mainstream childcare legislation by the Children Act l989, Holman's description of private fostering as a "market" still prevails. The fact is that the practice is still remarkably free from restraints. It is a practice that still allows children to be placed and received almost at will'. Foster carers are still found through friends "who know somebody who wanted a baby", through telephone calls as well as by advertisements.

If the manner of children's placements was bad, even worst was the manner in which birth parents sometimes removed the children. While the majority of placements was shown to last for an average of between 2 - 3 years, it was not uncommon for birth parents to remove a child just a few days after placement on account of distance and cost of travel or the expensive fee charged by the foster carer. Carers said that parents could remove their children or give notice of their intention to remove with just a telephone call and within days, they (parents) would arrive to take the child away. The worst scenario is when the child goes home for a weekend, only for the parents to telephone the carer and inform her that the child would not be returning.

Finally, the manner of placement and removal of children found in this study not only confirms other findings by Holman and Save the Children, it also shows that parties to

private fostering arrangements do not appear to take into account the age, condition, feelings and needs of the children involved when deciding on placements.

The practice was also found to contravene the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). In fact, the whole practice of private fostering found in the study areas could be said to fall foul of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to the extent that children were placed with no preparations and at parents' impulse with little information about them given to carers, and children removed without plans or safeguards in place. The children's rights to remain with parents, including the right to a reasonable standard of living or the right to health, education and basic services would surely have been compromised. By placing them transracially with families that were shown to lack appropriate cultural stimulation for the children, issues of right to language, cultural identity and religion would also have been compromised. The whole situation calls for a more proactive approach by Local Authorities in terms of inter-agency co-operation and liaison in order for local authorities to begin to satisfy themselves that the welfare of children privately fostered in their areas is safeguarded and promoted. This is the subject of discussion in the final section.

It will be interesting to know how the courts in England and Wales will decide cases in future if previously privately fostered children decide to sue local authorities in to which they were fostered, for failure to safeguard their welfare especially in the light of recent adoption of the Human Rights law by the government of the United Kingdom. This will also be interesting in the light of the paramouncy principle of the Children Act 1989, which provides that the interest of the child should be the determining factor in any administrative or legal matters concerning the child. Having said that however, in doing this research one was struck by the carers' strong commitment to their tasks, a sense of conviction and dedication to what they were doing. The study should not be used to give the impression that all private foster carers were unsuitable. The study has

shown that carers did not do it mainly for the money. However, as already noted many of them went about their task, ignorant of the cultural, racial or religious needs of the foster children. As stated earlier there was cause for concern both in the ability of the carers to provide appropriate cultural stimulation and even some of them to give a good enough level of physical care because of their low educational standards and as they grow older. But alongside the unsuitable ones are also those whose services have been an essential social service providing not only a family environment to children whose parents could not do so, but who also sacrificed everything to enable their foster children to have the best of their fostering experiences.

Many foster carers in this study were shown to be people who enjoyed looking after their foster children and would do so even when parents did not pay them for looking after the children. One had the impression that many of them were loving people struggling to do a good job in difficult circumstances with little or no support.

iv) Issue of Race, Culture, Religion and Language-

Looking after children may bring many rewards to families, but as found in this study, it is not a straight forward job especially when they are not one's own or come from families with different ethnic, cultural and religious traditions. Such situations can present additional challenges for foster carers. Carers' ability to access the necessary help or expert knowledge about their foster children also depended on knowing what constituted the child's culture or linguistic and religious traditions.

Whereas foster carers expressed the need for their foster children to acquire appropriate cultural identities, they lacked the mechanisms to enable this to happen. The situation was compounded by the marginal roles played by the Social Services in the whole process of private fostering.

Enabling the child to develop a positive identity is also about protecting them from exploitation and abuse and helping them to learn how to deal with this when it

occurs. To help their foster children, private foster carers needed to give high priority to respecting, reflecting and re-enforcing the cultural and racial aspects of the children's identity. But, as this study found, most carers dealt with instances of racial name-calling or bullying experiences of their wards by telling them to ignore such incidents. To them all that mattered was "love". The fact that they loved and cared for the children was all that mattered. By emphasising that "underneath" we are all God's children, carers failed to acknowledge such issues as society's definition of "beauty" as, for example, light skin, long blonde hair, fine features and any other colour eyes but brown they have also defined "ugly". This to others who do not fit the latter definition must therefore mean, for example, dark skin, short hair, broad features and brown eyes. As a result a black child called "darkie", Packie, "nigger" etc, must feel ugly, as they become more aware of differences in skin colour. A knowledgeable and supportive carer will be one who can help the child understand why he/she is called such names or are the colour they are, and how people are different. But where the carer attempts to or tells the child to ignore such differences, this cannot be in the interests of black children growing up in mainly white environments. The burden is on foster carers to help the children early in life to understand that it is not their colour that is the problem but other people's attitudes to it. The children need to know from the start that they are valued for what they are.

Despite Britain today being an ethnically pluralistic society, this has not been reflected in practice or service delivery. People's categorisation has had the effect of emphasising differences and neglecting needs. Ahmad (1990) pointed out that one of the fundamental issues for black children is how they become victims of ignorance, dilemma, unawareness, subjective judgements, insensitivity and prejudice on the part of Social Services. The outcome of such a situation is that black children pay the price for lack of awareness of the impact of 'race' on social work intervention. Therefore when foster carers and social workers adopt a "colour-blind" approach to bringing up West

African children, such an approach ignores black children's needs arising specifically from their race and culture. For example, needs in terms of hair and skin care, which are important aspects of their identity and development in much the same way as their dietary and religious needs. Race and culture form part of a worldview – a frame of reference within which to consider what is good, acceptable or desirable within that social sphere.

This study highlights the situation where a large number of West African children (mostly Nigerians) are placed in white, rural areas in England with almost no other representative of their culture or race in the vicinity. The implications of the situations to issues of the rights of the children to their identity and culture did not appear to have concerned the foster carers, birth parents or the Social Services whom, by law, have a duty and responsibility to safeguard these. The complexity of the situation is that while the Social Services ignore these children because they do not approve of the practice, paradoxically, these children are among the most vulnerable in the local authorities and are therefore those whose welfare needs safeguarding and promoting.

v) **Support to Carers-** Intimately linked to the ability of parents to provide adequate care for their children is the level of support they receive in their parenting tasks. Support is a vital part of fostering enabling foster carers to undertake their specific tasks and responsibilities. Research in this field concluded that supporting foster carers maximises their effectiveness and minimises the breakdown of placements. However evidence that support makes much difference to parenting outcomes remained inconclusive, and is an area in which researchers need to do more work.

This study has found that the main sources of support to carers came from their immediate or extended families and their friends or neighbours. Carers said that they relied on each other for support in looking after their private foster children. Whether the stability of these placements was due to the support from these sources or the age at

which the children were placed, remained undetermined. However the main area of concern that this section of the discussion will address is the Social Services as a source of support to private foster carers. This is discussed in terms of their involvement with the whole process leading to the placement of children and continuing contact during placements as well as their roles when placements are brought to an end.

The frequency and nature of visits by social workers to foster carers and children in this study has already been discussed. However it has to be re-emphasised that visits by social workers were relegated to the "as and when time allows" principle rather than based on guidelines provided by the Children Act 1989. Foster carers thus perceived these visits as only keeping an eye on things rather than implementing any radical changes to the practice. As for practical help to foster carers, little was offered to them by the Social Services; rather carers said that they had most practical or material help from one another through their fortnightly 'coffee mornings'. Practical assistance which carers said they expected social workers to offer was in assisting to locate children after their return to birth parents or assisting when parents defaulted on payments. But no social worker in the areas studied was reported to be doing any of these. Training of foster carers as a form of support was not available to private foster carers in this study. Although it was not possible to corroborate this with the Social workers in the main study, Social workers in the pilot said that none of their private foster carers had benefited from any training at the time of the interviews. This came as a surprise since previous studies (Holman, 1973, CRE 1993, SSI, 1994, and Save the Children, 1997) had all emphasised this as an essential ingredient of successful foster placements. If the level of support to private foster carers was unacceptable, there was no support of any description given to birth parents. This was the product of a non-existent contact or relationship between the Social Services and birth parents. In the pilot to this study, social workers said that they had no contact with the birth parents of the 18 children privately placed in their areas. In the main study the situation was

portrayed by foster carers' complaints that social workers never helped them follow up children who had gone back or when removed unannounced by parents. It also showed in the manner in which children could be placed on short notice without the knowledge of the Social Services.

The marginal and almost negligible role of the Social Services in the whole process of private fostering led to the perception by carers that the Social Services were against them (carers) fostering black children and when they visited, these were usually to catch them out. Although carers had suspicions about social workers' motives for visiting, they however indicated that they should visit regularly in order to check on those that were not "doing it properly".

On the basis of the findings in this study overall, it is fair to conclude with respect to support, that the Social Services were not seen as an important link in the support network of the foster carers. The roles they played bore little resemblance to those outlined by the Children Act 1989 or the Guidance and Regulations to the Act. Both social workers' supervisory, monitoring and educational roles were only occasionally carried out or not at all in the case of training of private foster carers. In one area, an opportunity to work alongside carers in the community was lost as social workers failed to use the carers' fortnightly "coffee mornings" as a basis for positive partnership work with them. Such a forum could have been used to provide training by experts from the children's culture to carers on many of the areas that have posed problems to them in looking after the children. Such an opportunity was lost mainly because of the lack of any meaningful relationship between the Social Services and the foster carers. Therefore despite the general and greater need of private foster children and carers for help, they received little help from the Social Services.

iv) Social Work Practices regarding Private Fostering-

The legal framework for private fostering is set out in Part 1X of the Children Act, Section 66-70 and schedule 7. The relevant regulations are the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulation 1991. The legislature requires local authorities to satisfy themselves that individual private fostering arrangements are satisfactory and foster carers and premises are suitable. They do not register or approve private foster carers but Volume 8 of the Children Act 1989 states that "A proper balance, therefore, has to be maintained between parents' private responsibilities and statutory duties towards private foster children". This implies that the authorities have to ensure that arrangements are satisfactory and private foster carers are suitable. Local authorities through their staff (social workers) have to conduct pre-placement investigations and assessments of the suitability of prospective foster carers

However, as this study showed, Social Services through the social workers were only peripherally involved and failed to make any real impact or influence. The manner of placements meant that the Social Services Departments were only acting on information provided by carers rather than being proactive and going out to seek private foster placements and/or liaison with other agencies (Health visitors, GP Surgeries and Education) in order to make greater impact.

Although attempts to obtain information from local authorities in whose areas the study was conducted proved fruitless, inferences can be drawn from the lessons learnt from the pilot and local authorities responses to request for their participation in the study. The pilot showed that there was no countywide policy for private fostering and because the practice was not seen as a countywide phenomenon, social workers were left to formulate local policies on how to deal with the anomaly in their Area offices.

Private fostering was at the bottom of the Social Services priority list of childcare services in those areas. There were no dedicated social workers for private fostering

and it was not unusual to find that only one or two workers were assigned to supervise and monitor private foster placements well in excess of 30. Local authorities also showed a general lack of enthusiasm by their insistence that "private fostering only constituted a small aspect of the childcare services dealt with by this Authority".

What this study found most disturbing however, is the fact that almost three decades after Holman (1973), and recently both the SS1 Inspection (l994) and Save the Children's research (l997), similar concerns about Social Service practices and procedures regarding private fostering are still being expressed. These concerns were and still are: -

- Information about private fostering and the requirements to notify local authorities of placements were virtually unknown to the general public. The result is the case of under notification. – Social Services were not always notified of placements before they occurred, so children were being placed with strangers without any checks being undertaken to ascertain carers' suitability or that of their premises.
- Private fostering arrangement procedures were not in place in most authorities and as a result it was always difficult to find the right team or section to get information about privately fostered children or their parents.
- There was no contact or working relationship between the Social Services and the birth parents as no birth parents in this study had any contact with the Social Services prior to, during, or after placing their children.
- There was no system of support in place for foster carers by the Social Services despite the generally disadvantaged situations of the private foster children.
- The local authorities had been unable to meet the placement needs of the children privately placed in their areas especially as the majority of the placements were transracial.
- Finally the low priority nature of private fostering in the various local authorities also means a general lack of resources both for staff and foster carers. The local

authorities trained none of the foster carer in the study as they would their foster carers. There was a total lack of support for foster carers, birth parents and children.

Above all, as found in the cited studies, private fostering has remained a marginalised aspect of the childcare services in England and indeed the "Cinderella" of childcare legislation in England and Wales. In the past, social workers have pointed to the lack of guidance and regulations in childcare legislation as a reason for their inability to act in this area. This might have been the case from the time of Holman's study up to the Children Act 1989, but there can be no excuse for local authorities' failure to have procedures in place for private fostering following the implementation of the Act, which is very explicit on their roles.

Being private arrangements, the crux of the practice lies in the need to strike a balance between parental rights, responsibilities and duties of foster carers and local authorities to ensure that the child's rights and welfare is safeguarded and promoted. On these points and in the manner in which local authorities, foster carers and parents were found to have acted, the whole childcare system can be said to be failing children who are privately fostered.

Given these findings, one might be tempted to argue that the practice be stopped and made illegal. But then what would be the alternatives to birth parents who in most cases resort to the practice because other childcare services are out of reach or not available? The ever-growing demands on local authorities' resources which have led to drastic cuts in services at the local levels will not allow local authorities to take on the extra responsibilities of taking these children into their care. Therefore as long as children are only taken into local authority care when there is a crisis or a breakdown in family relationships, and so long as West African parents wilfully seek placements for their children in rural areas of England and may be disqualified by virtue of Social Services Departments' set criteria, the practice of placing children in foster care through private

arrangement will continue. We can only hope to improve the practice through some of the suggestions offered in this study.

3. Implications for Policy and Practice in Private Fostering.

Having looked at the issues that impede the development work in private fostering in the areas of study, this Section will discuss the policy; management and social work practices, which are considered relevant to the development of private fostering in these areas in particular and as a general model of practice for child, care services.

This study demonstrates that a great difference can be made to the tone and thrust of policy and practice in private fostering if planning and improvements are made in certain key areas. The suggestions here are based on the findings in this study and on the opinions and experiences of foster carers who have been involved in private fostering and the noted absence of any meaningful social work involvement in the whole process. This is done against the background of the provisions of the Children Act 1989, which states, "The local authority shall satisfy themselves that the welfare of children privately fostered in their area is being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted. That the arrangements are satisfactory and the foster parents are suitable to care for the child" (Section 67).

Since this study has noted the failure of local authorities to develop clear procedures in relation to policies regarding private foster care, and if there has to be improvements in the services offered to those involved in the practice and the children, the challenges for social workers and the Social Services will hinge on the following key areas: -

i) **Notification: -** Information about private fostering and requirement to notify local authorities of placements was found by both the SSI inspection and the Save the Children to be "virtually unknown to the general public". There is therefore the need for wider publicity and information by local authorities on private fostering if they hope to increase people's level of notification. This has to be anchored in the development of publicity material for parents and foster carers that fully informs them about their responsibilities and duties towards children in private foster placements. Information such as the BAAF publication for both fosters carers (Looking after other People's Children) and birth parents (Private Fostering and you) can be made freely available to parties to a private fostering arrangement. However information and publicity alone may not be enough to encourage parents and foster carers to notify the Social Services Departments, especially if there is an air of antagonism and suspicion between the parties. Misunderstanding about the role of the Social Services Department or their involvement in private fostering may also deter carers or parents from notifying the authorities. Other incentives such as social workers working alongside foster carers and parents within the community to enable these people to see the benefits of such partnership work and thereby giving them confidence in what they do. Above all such publicity material as may be produced needs to be widely circulated using the local media, schools, and doctors' surgeries and health centres. The publicity material should also be produced in other languages as well as English and in formats that make it accessible to children, families, and the general public and professionals from other agencies.

ii) **Procedures for Private Fostering-** Social Services Departments need to have well-developed policies, procedures and guidelines relating to private fostering. In this way private fostering will become part of the local authorities' overall childcare policy rather than a low priority and a marginalised aspect of the childcare services of most local authorities. A clearly defined and written policy on private fostering entails

defining the priority areas, which will form the focus of its services and the resources available for the scope and range of provisions.

The local authorities will need to have such an organisational arrangement in which private fostering fits in both at the level of management and throughout its operational or area offices. Thus a countywide policy on private fostering is required for all local authorities to address the variable practice found in many authorities and Social Services Departments during this study. A considerable level of confusion and lack of clarity about private fostering still exist and social workers were left to grope in the dark and make policies on the hop.

The above situation has led to a situation where social workers have reacted to incidents where major child protection issues have been raised or reported. Good practice would be that in which the social workers are proactive in seeking out placements, monitor and supervise these placements and review them when necessary in order to satisfy themselves as to the welfare of the children privately fostered in their areas. This should be backed up with regular visits by the social workers in accordance with the requirements of each placement.

iii) **Ensuring the Welfare of the Child -** The duty of local authorities to satisfy themselves that the welfare of a privately fostered child in their area is safeguarded and promoted, has to be balanced with the parental rights to make these placements. To ensure that this does not create conflict between parental rights and responsibilities and protecting the child's rights and welfare, it is suggested that social workers act to ensure that areas of potential or actual conflict between carers and parents are resolved at the start of the placements.

This can be done by having clearly written agreements between the two parties. The contents of such agreements can be verified and its contents agreed by both parents and carers. Such an agreement should include the purpose and expected duration of the

placements and a mechanism on how any default or changes on the agreement can be addressed.

These agreements and plans however have to include the child's rights to express his/her views (depending on the child's age and understanding). Given the young ages, at which children are placed, the onus is on the local authorities through its agents to ensure that the best interests of the child are paramount in any placement. The local authority can ensure that the emotional well being of the child is safeguarded with particular consideration to his/her needs for stability, continuity and for positive attachment. The child should have regular contact with his/her extended family, including siblings. These are ideals, which the SSI espoused as likely to guarantee that the rights of the child are given priority when private fostering placements are considered.

A social worker's involvement at the beginning of placement to help both birth parents and carers clarify how the range of parenting tasks will be carried out can help prevent the kinds of situations found in most placements in this study. This is referring to the uncontrolled and unplanned manner in which children are privately placed without preparations and/or information about them or a clear idea about parents' objectives for the placements.

iv) Support Systems: While most childcare literature agree that support is a vital part of the fostering service (discussed in chapter eight), this study found that agency support to private foster carers was virtually non-existent. This had the consequence that a state of confusion, antagonism and suspicion existed between carers and the Social Services Department. This study has consistently shown the tangential or marginal roles played by the Social Services at every stage of a private fostering arrangement. To ensure that the duty of local authorities to satisfy themselves that the welfare of the child in private foster care is safeguarded, the issue of support to foster

carers has to be reviewed. In terms of assisting carers to do follow-up on children that might have gone back to their birth parents on reaching 16years, the Social Services can evoke Section 24 of the Children Act 1989, which deals with advice and assistance to children either, looked after by local authorities or through private arrangements. Section 24 confers on local authorities a statutory responsibility to assist any young person who reaches the age of 16 years, and who had either been looked after by the local authority or had been in private foster care in the area, and who may or may not, presently be residing in the local authority area. This could serve as another means by which Social Services may endear themselves to private foster carers and also hope to remove the current air of suspicion and antagonism between them. Based on the findings of this study the challenge to Social Services in the area of support should be anchored on the followings: -

a) Partnership Work - Partnership is an essential part of work with those engaged with private fostering. Social workers need to be seen as partners in foster carers' fostering tasks rather than being perceived as they presently are, as people who are out to catch both carers and birth parents. The importance of maintaining and promoting contact with parents, relatives, community and culture has been increasingly recognised as a crucial aspect of good childcare practice. This is endorsed by the Children Act 1989 and accompanying guidance, with an explicit expectation that local authorities will now work actively with parents and others. Implementation of the Act demands a high level of partnership between local authorities and parents as well as with children. Where there is understanding between these parties brought about by partnership, a major step would have been taken towards improving the quality of the placements. The many and diverse meaning of partnership according to Masson et al (1997), means "sharing" marked by respect for one another. role divisions, rights to information, accountability, and

value accorded to each individual input; shared power, and decision jointly made and backed by legal and moral rights. It therefore means that parent, foster carers, and social workers need to work together with the best interests of the child as their ultimate objective.

b) Training - The transracial nature of the placements means that foster carers need to be very well informed about the needs of these children arising from their cultural, racial, religious and linguistic backgrounds. To be able to provide care and nurturing which take heed of these characteristics, local authorities have to develop a system of training to foster carers aimed at addressing these equal opportunity needs of the children. There is the need for a support group or forums run for carers to discuss issues and share ideas about good practice. Social Services Departments can do well to disseminate information by bringing in those with expert or specialist knowledge to educate foster carers on some of the cultural needs mentioned earlier. For example, Nigerians with specialist knowledge about such areas as skin and hair care and childrearing practices of West Africans can be brought in to teach carers how to undertake these tasks.

There are such organisations as the African Women Association who are concerned about private fostering and amongst whom are doctors, paediatricians, midwives, lawyers and educationalists. Local authorities can bring some of the experts to the carers' forum to enlighten them about issues such as Sickle Cell Anaemia, medical and dietary habits and the general way of life in West Africa. For the children and moreso the carers, the Association of Transracially Adopted and fostered people (ATRAP) can be approached to talk to carers and children about their experiences of being transracially fostered and the attendant problems involved. This organisation gives members the opportunity to meet and talk about their experiences and also

provide support to its members in order to reduce the pains of isolation often caused by placements in predominantly white areas, and other related problems after leaving care.

What this suggests is that support and training of private foster carers should be part of the authorities' overall support policy for carers and children – either in private or public care. This is particularly important especially in relation to such areas as separation and loss, child development, the role of parents and knowledge in relation to different cultures.

While private foster carers may be acting with the best of intentions by providing adequate physical care, other skills and knowledge (as have been shown in this study) are needed to help both carers and children sort out the complex relationships involved. Training and support are needed to help carers understand the emotional impact on the child as well as the ability to acquire information necessary to form a secure identity. However that is done, this researcher believes that local authorities must address the training and support needs of private foster carers in their areas. A community based forum as a system of support for foster carers, birth parents and children should be developed (or they should support existing ones) in their areas.

While support and training is advocated for foster carers and children, birth parents on their part also need support with understanding their roles and responsibilities in the private fostering situations. Parents may have placed their children out of desperation and would not have had access to appropriate information - they need to have access to support and proper guidance to enable them to exercise their parental responsibility.

The reason(s) for birth parents' under-reporting of placements has often been the fear of the consequence of official involvement in their private fostering arrangements (both SSl and Save the Children works alluded to this without evidence to support the claim). But this study believes that good publicity and extensive liaison between local authorities and the West African communities in cities such as London, Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester will help to reduce these fears and suspicions.

There needs to be partnership between the various African Embassies and High Commissions and local authorities to enlighten and educate their nationals and parents about the benefits and dangers of private fostering and how they (parents) can help local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of their children in private foster care.

v) **Overcoming Issues of Race, Culture, Religion and Language-**

Issues of race, culture, religion and language were crucial themes found not only in this study but in previous works as well. These were deemed crucial enough for the SSl Inspection of Private Fostering l994 to state that: -

> "A picture emerged of black children being placed in white rural areas with almost no other representative of ethnic minorities in the vicinity. Carers appeared to have little or no knowledge of the culture these children were coming from and seemed unaware of the implications for children being placed in white rural families"(SSI. 1994).

The challenge before Social Services Departments therefore has to do with offering a high quality of supervision to private foster carers. As stated earlier, carers can be trained or given chances to acquire the knowledge through their forums and groups where people with specialist knowledge can give talks to the group of foster carers. There are guides that have been produced by interest groups such as BAAF and the Health Visitors' Private Fostering Special Interest Group, which local authorities can obtain, and supply to their private foster carers. The guides seek to assist carers in supporting the racial and cultural origins of their private foster children and to ensure a smooth transition when the children return home. Ensuring that the welfare of the child in private foster care is safeguarded and promoted by local authorities also means raising awareness of the importance to a black child of having positive contacts with his/her race and culture. Such awareness by foster carers of the racial dimension of their task is essential to the well being of the child. Trained or specialist social workers can help ensure this as a normal process of the child's development. It is suggested that

items such as a family photo album with pictures of members of the child's extended family, scrap books telling the child's life story, books and stories with black heroes, letters from grandparents, can all help the transracially fostered child keep alive a vision of his/her background and re-enforce his/her security in placement. The Social Services can also use the "Children in Need" provisions to promote the welfare of privately fostered children.

The Act says that advice should be given to foster carers about the legislation. This can be used positively by social workers to help carers get services they need to understand and meet the cultural and racial needs of the child by buying into services of experts from the community or identified professionals.

All these depend on the initial involvement of social workers in the process, from notification, assessment, visits, defining the purpose and duration of placements to care plans and review of placements. Engaging in these activities by social workers would not only minimise the chances of conflict in relation to race, culture, religion and language but will ensure that foster carers provide the best possible quality of transracial private foster care. Only if local authorities have a system which includes advising and helping foster carers and birth parents to realise the importance of those factors which affect the privately foster child's emotional and racial identity, can it be possible for them to satisfy themselves that the welfare of these children is safeguarded and promoted.

4. Inter-departmental partnerships and co-operation for private fostering:

Lack of inter-agency co-operation and partnerships has underpinned some of the difficulties of providing quality care and protection to privately fostered children in the care system. The Audit Commission (1994) highlighted this problem and suggested that there was the need for the Social Services, Education and Health departments to address

this problem through a system of collaboration and strategic planning so as to enhance both the educational and health needs of looked after children. This study found very little evidence of co-operative working relationships between professionals for the good of West African children privately fostered in the areas studied. Given the fact that private fostering has now been shown to be an under-fives phenomenon, one would assume that Health Visitors would have better access and information about these children in the course of their work, and would therefore have discovered many of the unreported cases of private foster placements. For children of school age, the schools should be able to work closely with the Social Services in order to have better information about new children moving into the area and into schools. The essence of the strategic work would be to reassure carers that the work is in the interest of the children and to make their task of caring much simpler rather than foster carers feeling that these departments were out to catch them or report them to the authorities for non-compliance with regulations. The ability of the Local Authorities to satisfy themselves that the welfare of children privately fostered in their area is safeguarded and promoted also depends on their co-operating with these agencies whose staff are in constant contact with the children in their daily duties in the community.

Specifically with respect to the education department, there needs to be high level liaison between them and the Social Services in order to ensure that the children's educational needs are addressed and that they are reaching their full potential especially in the light of various findings by the SSI inspection of services for looked after children in England and Wales that these children are more likely to leave care with very little educational qualifications or are likely to be unemployed than children who had not been in care (DOH, 1998).

Therefore rather than working in isolation as they seem to do presently, local authorities should build up good links for co-ordination and co-operation with health and Educational Services as well as with voluntary agencies. This means having in

place practice guidelines on inter-agency co-operation that should also involve the home areas where birth parents reside in England. At another level of co-operation, it is suggested that the local authorities through the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) should work closely with West African communities. These communities in Britain should be involved in raising awareness of the particular childcare problems that they face; educate its people about the dangers of private fostering to their children if they engage in it without guidance and direction by the appropriate agencies or authority.

Rather than relying on current types of local authority child care provisions, West African communities should be advocating that provisions of childcare services should take cognisance of the particular peculiar needs that can meet their childcare needs.

Since religion seems to occupy such a central position in the lives of West African parents, awareness campaigns should seek to target birth parents using this channel. Church leaders can talk to their congregations about the need to follow the right channels, which will not compromise the welfare and development of their children. In this way the current suspicion parents have about official involvement might be reduced. The messages should be phrased in such manner that parents are reassured that it is the welfare of their children that the concerns lies and not aimed at checking on their immigration or tax statuses. Above all, there should not be any forms of threat to parents about losing their children or having these children taken into local authority care. No West African parent would like to see that happen especially given the high premium placed on children and relationship of a child to the extended family. Educating parents should aim to enable them understand their rights and obligations under the law. This has a much greater chance of success than any veiled threat.

5. **The Central Government:** A strong lead needs to be taken by central government through the Department of Health either directly or indirectly in order to promote the welfare of privately fostered children. It can do this either by developing a national framework for private fostering or "police" local authorities to fulfil their private fostering duties and responsibilities and to impose some form of sanction where they fail to do so. Virtually a decade after the issuance of the Guidance and Regulations to the Children Act 1989 Volume 8, there are observable differences in the way local authorities apply the same piece of legislation. The introduction of a national framework and co-ordination of private fostering may ameliorate this situation. It will ensure that there are national statistics on privately fostered children, carers and their motives. Currently the lack of a national notification system has greatly weakened the legislation, leading to a situation where local authorities have failed to satisfy themselves that the welfare of privately fostered children are safeguarded and promoted.

Sir William Utting reported from his Review of Safeguards for children Living Away from Home (1997) that many councils were not complying with regulations and guidance on private fostering. This, the report noted, was unacceptable because the children were judged to be amongst the most vulnerable children living away from home. Utting considered three options to deal with the situation that bordered on the followings;

- Leaving things as they were;
- De-regulate the practice on grounds that current regulations are unenforceable, or
- Enforce regulations on the basis of the risk to children.

The report considered all three options but rejected all of them on three grounds. Firstly that to take the first option would be the worst of all worlds to give an appearance of safeguard while in reality these are not complied with. Secondly, de-regulation would mean abandoning children to their fate and possibly open up a

floodgate or 'honey pot' for potential abusers frustrated as a result of safeguards elsewhere in the system. Thirdly, they decided not to burden social Services Departments with commitments they could not realistically fulfil.

Utting recommended that privately fostered children should have the full protection of statutory regulations. To do this, it was recommended that the local authorities should register private foster carers, as is currently the case with Childminders and providers of Day Care Services. The Government was also advised to make it a criminal offence to foster privately without registration or for parents to place their children with unregistered foster carers.

While government accepted certain aspects of the recommendations of the Utting report, especially those that implored local authorities to follow existing regulations and guidance, it rejected the proposals that local authority should register and approve private foster carers. In its response to the report government said;

> "The government will not seek legislation to require authorities to register private foster parents. It does not consider that a new system of regulation is necessary as there is already a wide range of offences associated with private fostering and government does not believe it would be right to extend them further" (Section 3.4. pp. 20).

Government however promised to take steps in 1999 to enforce the current regulations for private fostering more effectively. It also among other things pledged to embark on an awareness campaign targeted at the most vulnerable children; and when parliamentary time allowed, it would introduce legislation to target private fostering regulations (whether singular or consecutive) lasting more than 42 days.

However it took the Department of Health until June 2000 to take any action when it issued a press release entitled "Crackdown on private Fostering Regulations" (see appendix 7). The essence of the press release was to reiterate government's response to the Utting report and its findings regarding private fostering including local authorities' failure to fulfil their responsibilities to safeguard the welfare of such children. It was also to inform the public about a letter issued by the Chief Inspector of

the Social Services (SSI) to all councils asking them to review whether they were fulfilling their statutory responsibilities to children privately fostered in their areas (see appendix 8 for text of the SSI letter to the councils). Essentially the letter was a reminder to the councils about their supervisory and monitoring responsibilities to children in private foster care. But it was also the result of the passage of the Care Standards Bill passed in the House of Lords where peers requested a new registration system for privately fostered children.

Amazingly the government still rejected a system of registration and insisted that Section 67 of the current legislation is adequate if only Local Authorities comply with regulations and Guidance in this area.

To ensure this, ministers have asked local authorities through the SSI to,

- Ensure that their councils are complying with legal requirements;
- SSI to undertake an inspection (between December 2000 and March 2001) to collect more detailed information about existing services; identify good practice and provide advice to councils on how to develop their own services; and
- To run an awareness campaign during 2001 to encourage carers and parents to contact their 'host' councils about children being cared for.

Councils were therefore requested to have robust arrangements in place prior to the awareness campaigns.

This researcher believes that the rejection of a system of registration for private foster carers by government is not based on any evidence adduced from research or work experiences from the field. This study has shown that there was a 100 percent call by foster carers for the registration of all those who foster through private arrangements. Foster carers' reasons were based on the need to curb bad practices amongst them; that registration would also help to raise standards and quality of care since social workers would have to inspect and supervise carers as they now do for Childminders and Day Care Services and no carer would like to be struck off because

of poor standards of care. There was a widespread belief among carers that being registered would confer on them some form of recognition and thus reassured parents that whoever they placed their children with, would have been sanctioned by the authority. Registration may also raise the profile of private fostering among Local Authorities, because registration and wide publicity would put the practice constantly on Social Services Department agenda.

Registration will also mean a uniform standard expected across all areas unlike the current situation where standards vary from carer to carer and from area to area. The current low rates of pay will also have to be harmonised either with those of local authorities or across all areas for people who privately foster. This may also solve the issue of poor-quality care provided by carers on grounds of low or irregular payments by birth parents. Since this study has shown that most birth parents are either in full or part- time employment, it is assumed that they can afford to pay for the upkeep of their children if minimum rates are set by law, and especially if the awareness campaigns are geared toward enlightening parents about their parental responsibilities and they would thus have a choice about whether to enter into an agreement with carers or not.

The argument in some quarters that registration would drive the practice underground is not backed by any fact, as available evidence suggests the contrary especially if there is a partnership between parents, carers and social workers who should go into the relationship as professionals guided by the need to enhance and safeguard the welfare of the child rather than be perceived by the others as only interested in punishing then for their actions or oversights.

Messages from the field especially from members of the Private Fostering Practice Issue Group who are either practising social workers responsible for supervising private foster placements or health Visitors, are all agreed that registration is the way forward. This group has consistently lobbied and advocated for registration of private fostering mainly due to the inconsistencies in how local authorities handle private fostering

within their childcare policies and practices. Members have also pointed out that non-registration has created and provided local authorities with a 'get out' clause which Social Services have so often had recourse to in order to turn blind eyes to unsuitable placements in their areas for fear that enforcing regulations or prohibitions would entail further resource implications to councils already bedevilled with cutbacks in services and funds. It was shown in the pilot study that social workers did not take steps to enforce regulations or prohibitions where the placements were found to be unsuitable because they did not know whether their actions would be supported by their superiors or managers. Such a situation points to the effects of, or lack of countywide policy and practice guidelines on private fostering. What difference this new initiative by government will make to the performances of Social workers in an atmosphere of cuts in resources and staff shortages remains to be seen. Unless there is a system of penalties and sanctions against non-compliance with legal requirements, the new initiative may well be another well-intentioned piece of policy that local authorities in their present financial predicaments, may not be able effectively to implement.

As far as the findings of this research show, many issues relevant to private fostering are very complex and have over the years remained largely unresolved. Successive studies, reviews, inspections, media commentaries, and now government documents, have shown that there have been extensive failures at all levels of the practice of private fostering: Under-notification, haphazard placements, and lack of councils' compliance with regulations and Guidance which collectively, have exposed the children to risks of abuse and neglect. Local authorities by their failure to satisfy themselves that the welfare of those children privately fostered in their area is safeguarded and promoted, have also denied the children those rights as enshrined in the principles of the Children Act 1989, and by implications, those rights espoused in the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991).

The general situation of privately fostered children found in this study with regard to either their involvement in decision making or having their views heard, and guaranteeing their needs and welfare arising from their racial, linguistic or cultural backgrounds, also reflect the general situation of looked after children generally whether privately or publicly fostered. It reflects to some extent the apparent crises in fostering and the childcare system overall; a problem that is briefly discussed below.

6. Implications of these findings to fostering policy and practice generally:

The catalogue of failures in the system regarding privately fostered children appears to be the tip of the childcare system's iceberg. In the late 1990s a position had been reached in relation to the care system in which a number of major problems were evident: Findings from SSI report of looked after children (1998) indicated that only a few Social Services Departments were able to base placements on an assessment of needs which clearly considered safety and risks, and that decision-making tended to be crises led rather than adequately planned. Other main criticisms have been linked to service organisation and quality. As with private fostering, the public care system was shown to be bedevilled by a lack of strategic planning for children, inadequate care plans and assessment, and a severe shortage of carers. Over the years, the current failures in the system have consistently been echoed; from Norman Warner and Sir William Utting's various investigations, through to Lord Laming's annual SSI report (1998). In all of these reports, the need for a strategic approach to children's services- with effective staff vetting procedures and proper auditing of outcomes, - has been endlessly underlined. Official responses have always barely scratched the surface of these problems or gone far enough as to address these concerns raised.

An important area of neglect has been in the failure of the system to listen and treat children in care as individual human beings as enshrined in law. A report by the

Who Cares Trust (1998) pointed to the gaping holes in the system when it comes to meeting legislation's requirements on taking children's views into account. Thus today children and young persons can be placed without genuine choice of care. Berridge (1997) in a review of foster care research also noted that the Social Services Departments did not recognise foster care as a skilled professional activity and therefore failed to involve carers in the planning process for children; and as such, training and support were generally patchy because foster carers were not generally seen as professional partners of social workers.

The Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) has also criticised the practice among local authorities. Consistent with the SSI report, the ADSS (1997) reported that foster care services were structured often outside overall planning for looked after children; lack of placement choice for children, too many placements made away from home and community, including high levels of disruptions and placement moves. Given these failures of the system, surely a framework has to be developed which sets out how the lot of vulnerable children and families, including those looked after by local authorities or through private arrangements, can be safeguarded and promoted. To that end, this study is inclined to recommend that:

- As a concept of placement choice for children, a decision to place a child in foster care should be taken on the basis of that option being selected from a range of possible placement options, as being in the best interest of the child, rather than as a resource-led decision or because there are no other placement options;
- Authorities should develop a system of recruitment and training of foster carers, including adequate support, be they public or private foster carers.
- Each child in foster care whether public or private, should be assigned a named social worker who should undertake specific work with the child and, or his /her family towards goals established in the child's care plan. None of the children in

this study had attached social workers and as a result, were isolated and had no support of any kind from the Social Services.

- Local Authorities should develop a structure and avenues which enables them to make decisions in partnership with foster carers, children, and birth parents, and which also acknowledges the importance of cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds of children which will go a long way to generally support and promote the needs of children looked after. It also means identifying the groups and mechanisms through which these would be realised.
- It means developing carers' self-help groups in all local councils where carers can have avenues to exchange information and discuss concerns regarding the children they look after, and where the local authorities can support them by servicing the meetings through finding venues, speakers and trainers. They should also provide carers with free membership of the National Foster Care Association (NFCA) as some local authorities have done for their public foster carers.
- Above all, foster carers should be involved in service development by being on working or planning groups. In this way, their needs and concerns can be expressed directly to those making decisions about policies and services.
- The ethos of the Children Act- promoting partnerships and reunion of families should be seen to be reflected in formal policy aims, such as carer training, which encourages parental and family contacts.
- All councils need to have in place; comprehensive strategies for appraising their services for looked after children- policy objectives in terms of targets, time scales and performances relating to children services generally.
- A key element of this has to be an effective management and information system, which collates and stores data on looked after children in order to provide specific information on foster care. It should not be like the current situation where

information on privately fostered children is spread across various teams and not centrally collated. The new system should include details of the number and types of foster placements, levels of unmet needs, outcomes of children who are fostered and the effectiveness of the foster services generally.

- The appointment of a Children's Right Commissioner for England and Wales is long over due (although the national Assembly for Wales is already deliberating on the appointment of Children's Rights Commissioner).

The office or the commissioner shall be responsible for all children's issues and for care standards for children who deserve the care and protection of the state. Such an office will both unify regulations and centralise issues relating to children as opposed to the current situation where regulatory protections, according to the Department of Health, are incomplete and patchy because they are either non-existent or spread across a range of agencies (DOH, 1998. Pp 64-66).

The introduction of Quality Protects as a major extension of central control through targeting and standard setting for children's services is welcomed. This is in as much as the focus is to improve the well being of all looked after children, children in the child protection system, and those in need requiring active support from Social services. Given this focus then, children privately fostered should be part of this initiative based on their vulnerable position or their being in need as have been identified and pointed out in this study. My concerns are however about what returns Social Services will give to Quality Protects questions regarding "how many children in need are there in local authorities' that need help from Social Services"; would their returns be limited to those children in the public care system or will privately fostered children be part of the answer? The answer can only be (one hopes), that for the sake of all children and in particular privately fostered children, it ought to be all-inclusive and child-centred than they are at the present. But if Quality Protects does not go far enough to address the fundamental problems

of the childcare system in its implementation, and only scratches the surface, not only would it have missed the chance to make a profound impact on childcare policies, but the government would also have let slip an opportunity to address issues of exclusion and the drive towards an inclusive society.

The issue as I see it is not only about resources or what forms of substitute care is best (because no single method can meet the placement needs of all children), a total spectrum of choice is needed. This can come about when the law, government guidelines and policies are re-focused on the need for good practice and improvements in current services. Unless there is a determined commitment to treat each child in care (public or private) as equal, all needing support and protection, Quality Protects may succeed in halting such things as multiple placements and help in some other ways, but it may not ensure that all children have what they need. All concerned need to take a fresh and vigorous look at what is happening in the day to day lives of children and be prepared to do away with some well established thinking and routines that seem to perpetuate current practice. It is in that respect that the words of the chair of the UK Joint Working Party on Foster Care, Tom White assumes much relevance when he said:

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> "For this to be achieved, each authority and each voluntary and independent agency…will need to assess whether its service is meeting these standards. They will need to improve services in any areas where they fall short of the standards…We would like every stakeholder in foster services to be clear that these are the standards of care the nation requires for all children and young people who are fostered" (UK Joint Working Party for Foster Care, NFCA, 1999).

7. The Future and Direction of Research in Private Fostering.

This research has made attempts to provide new and up to date information on the experiences of people who look after West African children through private arrangements; it has also been an attempt to indicate the levels of Social Services' involvement in the practice relative to their statutory duties and responsibilities to these children. To date there is still very limited literature on the subject. Holman's (1973)

work remains one of the most valuable sources on the subject even though it is now dated. Current and up to date research in this area is very scarce and where there is research, their conclusions have been based on very small samples; while various other small-scale works in the area tend to be in unpublished form. Reference is made here to the Save the Children's studies (1989,1993 and 1997) Staniland (1995), and the SSI inspection of Private Fostering (1994). This study does not however claim to be representative of private fostering as a whole. It has sought carefully to illustrate the current state of these arrangements and the definitions given to them by those engaged in the practice in the areas where the data was collected. Thus it is not unreasonable to suggest that the findings are relevant to how things were done, and for further development of private fostering policies in those areas in the future. A major contribution of this study lies in the contribution of new knowledge and perspective it makes toward achieving a greater level of understanding in this area of childcare. It has also become evident in the course of the study that many things are not well with the practice and a lot needs to be done. Specifically, it demonstrated that local authorities have yet to define a clear procedure in relation to their policies regarding private fostering. The work has shown a lack of social work involvement in addition to the under-notification of placements by both foster carers and birth parents. What was found is a situation where parties to private fostering arrangements did not have clearly defined objectives and expectations of the arrangements. It thus led to the atmosphere of uncertainty and suspicion, and generally poor quality of care for children so as to compromise the children's well being.

These findings provided the backdrop against which policy and practice implications were discussed in relation to the need for improvements and change in private fostering. Private fostering has remained a low priority area of childcare services in England with the results that carers, parents, and children and even social workers have remained unsupported. The situation was also exacerbated by the lack of

clarity of meaning and expectations. This is where there is a clear call for a much greater role for social workers. In line with this view, it was suggested that social workers should seek to ensure that there is no ambiguity about the nature, purpose and duration of placements. Foster carers need to understand that the children are temporarily with them and will be returning to their birth families in the future. Their understanding and acceptance of the situation can do much to ease the transition by helping to build up a positive picture of the birth parents and their culture, and by so doing, also ease the pains of separation which carers were shown to express when the children finally returned to their parents. In order to bring private fostering into the consciousness of practitioners and trainee social workers, it is essential that the subject receive serious consideration in the literature on foster care and social work training.

It is unacceptable to note that the conditions of privately fostered children found in the 1970s, 80s and early 1990s, by studies repeatedly cited, have not improved even with the integration of private fostering into mainstream childcare legislation in England (including the publication of the guidance and Regulations as obtains in Volume 8 of the Children Act 1989). One of the problems with discussing private fostering is the vast array of issues that this throws up. These relate to the fundamental and underlying reasons behind parents' use of private fostering. What do parents usually want or hope to gain from the practice either for themselves or the children they placed? What are their expectations? Answers also need to be found for such questions as:

- What have been the experiences of those children privately fostered and have since returned to their birth families?
- How have they defined their cultural identities and state of their self-esteem?

Future research concerns in this area also need to find answers to such questions as:

- Why West African parents would not place their children with other West African families, African families or other black families in the community; especially in

the light of recent research evidence (Rashid S.P, 2000) of positive outcomes for children placed with other Black foster carers.

- Why there is an over-representation of Nigerians among those who patronise private fostering.
- How children feel about their parents for placing them so early in life in isolated rural communities without any settled community of similar culture.

A greater question has to be how to access birth parents and find out their views and expectations and what they expect their children to acquire from their experiences. Research also has to find out where all those that carers could not cope with went to, or where all those that went out of care are. The unavailability of data on these issues necessitates the need for further research in this field.

This study has opened up new and interesting leads that future researchers have the tasks of following up and finding answers to some of the questions and concerns raised here. How near we are to understanding the murky waters of private fostering especially at the close of the 20th Century, only time shall tell.

It is hoped however, that this study will provide impetus for further research into private fostering and pave the way for the development of coherent policy and practice in this field.

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APPENDIX ONE:

Dear sir/ madam.

I am writing to ask if you could help me in a research I am doing at the University of Bristol into Private Fostering. I am especially interested in the private fostering of children of African origin. Very little is known about this group of children and in particular this area of childcare, and so my research is intended to increase our knowledge in this area so that the needs of both these children and those looking after them, are better understood with a view to giving them better support.

The purpose of my study is to look at the issues faced by private foster carers and the social services Departments in looking after African children in private foster care. The study is not to compare the practices or performances of named Local Authorities or agencies but essentially an exploratory study. You may be aware from recent publicity on Television and radio that the issue of fostering these children has been a cause for concern and, I believe, over dramatised. However, in the absence of good information it is difficult to deal with the more outrageous assertions. All responses will be treated in the strictest confidence. Reporting of the findings will be in the form of aggregated data where no individual Agency will be identified.

The result of the study will eventually form a part of a Ph.D. Dissertation, which is being supervised by Professor David Quinton and Julie Selwyn. I am enclosing with this letter, a brief Questionnaire which I will very much appreciate it if you can fill and return to me. Enclosed also is a copy of the ADSS approval for this study for your information and ease of reference.

Thank you very much and I look forward to receiving your response soon.

Yours sincerely,

Hale Longpet.

QUESTIONNAIRES ON PRIVATE FOSTERING OF CHILDREN OF AFRICAN ORIGIN IN ENGLAND: INITIAL SUREY OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES.

PLEASE TICK THE APPROPRIATE BOX.

1. Does this area Authority have a policy in place relating specifically to children in private foster care?

Yes	
No	
Do not know.	

2. Do you use the definition of private fostering as used in the 1989 Children Act to define children who are looked after through private arrangements?

Yes.	
No.	
Use some other criteria.	

3. Did this Authority have a policy on private fostering prior to the 1989 Children Act?

Yes.	
No.	
Do not know.	

4. Would you say that children in Private Foster care in this Area Authority are treated the same as those defined as in "NEED"?

Yes	
No.	
Sometimes.	

B). Why is this so?

5. Has your Department had any experience of African children Fostered privately in this Area?

Yes	
No.	
I do not know.	

6. Does your Department currently use, or plan to use the "LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN" system?

Currently using	

Does not use.	
Planned to use	

7. Please **TICK** the appropriate box of the statements below that best describes the situation in your Local Authority with respect to private fostering.

I) Private fostering is a high priority area of childcare.

No	
Yes	

ii) Children in private foster care are strictly supervised by Social Workers.

Yes	
No.	

Iii) Procedures for monitoring private fostering the same with Local Authority care.

Yes	
No.	

Iv) Foster carers who Foster privately are Vetted by the Department.

Yes	
No.	
Some but not all of them.	

V) This Authority is meeting its statutory responsibilities to children in Private foster care.

Yes.	
No.	

Vi) The Children's Act 1989 has given Social workers a clear and high degree of certainty on how to perform their child protection duties towards private foster children in this area.

Yes.	
No.	

8. Would you say that private foster carers in this Area Authority are fully supported by your Department with regards to the children they look after?

Yes they are.	
No they are not.	
Some forms of support given.	

9. What words/ phrases easily come to mind when you think about policies relating to African children in private foster care in this area?

B) Why is this so?

THANK YOU.

APPENDIX TWO:

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SOCIAL WORK PROFESSIONALS IN THE PILOT STUDY.

As you might have known, this is a research about children in private foster care; in particular children of West African origin who are in private foster care. I am here to talk to you about the procedures by which this Local Authority deals with these children. I will therefore be talking to you about your practical experiences as one who has worked with these children and their carers.

ON THE EXISTENCE OF ANY POLICY ON PRIVATE FOSTERING:

- As a start, would you briefly tell me about this L.A policy on private fostering;
- Could you say that these policies are operationalised through any written practice guidance? Explain.
- Would you say that these procedures are similar/dissimilar with those for children looked after by local Authority foster carers?
- In practice, would you say all children in foster care in this area are dealt with the same way? Why is this so?
- What policies exist to ensure that privately fostered children are well looked after?
- How are imputes from other Agencies co-ordinated with regards to children in private foster care?
- Have you had any recent case(s) of private fostering, and did you deal with it?

ON NOTIFICATION

- HOW MANY OF THE PLACEMENTS ON YOUR CASELOAD WERE NOTIFIED TO THE SOCIAL SERVICES PRIOR TO PLACEMENTS?
- What information do foster carers often give your office about a child when notifying you of a private fostering placement?
- Are you always told such information as the date and purposes of placement, the intended duration as well as the name and address of the person placing the child?

- How easy is it for foster carers to foster privately in this Local Authority and how do you think that this situation can be managed?
- From your experience, what would you say have been the methods by which Privately fostered children come into foster homes?
- What preparations do prospective foster carers need and do get before the children arrive?
- Would you say that this is a typical practice irrespective of whether it is L.A or private fostering?
- Could you explain further please!

CONSEQUENCES OF THE 1989 ACT

- What WOULD YOU SAY HAVE BEEN THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE 1989 ACT ON THE WAY THIS LOCAL AUTHORITY HANDLES ISSUE RELATING TO CHILDREN WHO ARE LOOKED AFTER?
- What consequence has that on the way privately fostered children are dealt with in this L.A?
- What actions are usually taken when people notify the L.A of their intention to foster privately or of a child coming into the household through private arrangement?

ON SOCIAL WORKERS VIEW OF PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES:

- What has been the practice that ensures the maintenance of parental responsibilities?
- How easy is it for parent to exercise their parental visits and duties when their children are in private foster care?
- Does this apply to all parents whose children are looked after? Does your department monitor such visits?

ON SUITABILITY OF CARERS, PREMISES AND ENVIRONMENT:

- What procedures dictate how this L.A determines the suitability or otherwise of private foster carers?

- What would you expect in an ideal private foster home? Please explain.
- From your experience, what factors or situations do you consider as most appropriate or damaging to children in private foster care?
- What would a social worker be looking out for in a good private foster placement plan for the child?
- Typically how do the social services ensure that the welfare of children in private foster care in this area are satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted?

ON MOTIVATION TO FOSTER:

-
- As far as you can determine from your experience what have been the major reasons that have motivated the carers to become and remain foster carers?
- How would you describe people who foster privately?
- What child protection issues are there in private foster placements?
- ` What can you say about the payments made to foster carers?

ON RACE ISSUES:

- What can you say to the argument that transracial placements do benefit societies because it fosters understanding between people?
- From your experience how would you describe foster carers' understanding of the race and ethnic issues involved in transracial fostering?
- What do you think that your office should do when parents decide to place their children with families of a different race or ethnicity?
- There is the argument that parents should the freedom to place their children with the minimum of intervention from L.A. how do you react to that?

ON ASSESSMENT AND SUPERVISION OF CARERS:

- Opinions are divided on the rigours of assessment of foster carers; there are those who want a more rigorous assessment for private foster carers, while others say it should be at the same level with Local Authority foster carers. Which would you suggest and why?

- How would you describe the supervision of private fostering in this local Authority? Why do you think that is so?
- What commitment would you identify that this L.A has towards West African children privately fostered in this L.A?
- On data collections how does this Dept. Collect and maintain data about these children?
- How systematic or easy is it to access this information about these children?

ON PROCEDURES FOR REVIEWS AND APPEALS:

- Could you say something about the procedure for reviewing placement situation?
- What are expected of carers in this situations and do they understand these?
- How many private foster children do you have on your caseload?
- How often do you visit families who foster privately and who are on your caseload?
- When was the last time you visited?
- Is the child always seen alone or in the presence of the foster carers?

ON THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE CHILDREN ACT ON THE DEGREE OF CERTAINTY OF SOCIAL WORKERS TO CARRY OUT THEIR DUTIES TO CHILDREN IN PRIVATE FOSTER CARE:

- THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO WOULD SAY THAT THE REGULATION AND GUIDANCE OF THE 1989 ACT HAS GIVEN SOCIAL WORKERS WITH A CLEAR DEGREE OF CERTAINTY ON HOW TO DEAL WITH CHILDREN IN PRIVATE FOSTER CARE; HOW DO YOU REACT TO THAT?
- What would you regard as social workers' role(s) in private fostering situation?
- How would you describe the R/SHIP between your Dept. and either the natural parents or the foster parents?
- What have been the areas of support that private foster carers have received from the social services Dept. Do you think that this is adequate?
- Sometimes because private fostering is a private arrangement, social workers that have to deal with these cases experience difficulties of support from their superiors; how would you describe the support you get from your superiors?

Through what other source(s) has your Dept. become aware of private fostering situations?

- What words /phrases come to mind when you think about policy towards private fostering in this Local Authority?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION AND ASSISTANCE

Appendix Three.

Dear Foster Parent,

CAN YOU HELP

I am a Nigerian student at Bristol University who is doing a research into the experiences of people who look after African children.

I would like to talk to them about their experiences. The purpose of the research is to find out how carers approach their task so that we can understand the care of these children better.

I have no connection with the Social Services in any way and anything you tell me will be kept confidential.

Would you like to talk to me about this so that we can understand how people doing this special kind of caring might be helped?

If you would like to help, please fill the attached slip and send it directly to me using the enclosed self- addressed stamped envelope.

You can contact me directly also on **Bristol: 0117- 9254552**.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Hale Longpet.

REPLY SLIP.

I WOULD LIKE TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT MY EXPERIENCE OF LOOKING AFTER AFRICAN CHILDREN.

MY ADDRESS IS:----------

TELEPHONE: ----------.

APPENDIX FOUR.

Dear ----------.

RESEARCH ON PRIVATE FOSTERING OF CHILDREN OF West African ORIGIN:

I am a 39-year-old Nigerian social worker and I am a PhD research student in the school for Policy Studies of the University of Bristol. My research interest in the area of private fostering (i.e. the private fostering of children of West African origin). My interest in this area stems from the fact that I have been involved in work with children and families in Nigeria and have, through contact with social workers in England, become aware that a large number or Nigerian children are privately fostered in England. There is a general lack of information and knowledge about this among Nigerian social workers and equally no government policy on this issue in Nigeria.

The purpose of my study is entirely to look at the issues faced by private foster carers and the social services Departments in looking after children of West African origin. The study is not to compare the practice or performance of named Local Authorities or agencies. The study is essentially exploratory. All information concerning the Authorities and carers will be held and treated in the strictest confidence, and written up in a way that will not make it possible to identify either.

You may be aware from recent publicity on television and radio that the issue of fostering of these children has been a cause for concern and, I believe, over-dramatised. However, in the absence of good information it is difficult to deal with the more outrageous assertions.

I am writing to ask you for assistance in this research by putting me in touch with private foster carers and key social workers that deal with private fostering in your Department. I also understand both the ethical and moral issues involved in this kind of work and pledge that all matters of confidentiality shall be discreetly handled. My background as a West African social worker gives me a particular insight into culture and kinship care in West Africa and I would be happy to contribute to in-service training in this area.

The Local Authority would have access to a summary of the main findings of the research if required for the benefit of improving practice in this area of childcare in your Department. I have also just successfully concluded piloting the Research in one Area Division of a Social Service Department in a South Western county without any problem.

I have also obtained the approval of the ADSS for this research, a copy of which is enclosed for your information and ease of reference.

I hope that you feel able to help.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Hale G. Longpet.

APPENDIX FIVE.

PRIVATE FOSTERING OF WEST AFRICAN CHILDREN RESEARCH:

Interview Guide for Private foster carers'

Introduction: (Reaffirm the objectives of the study and thank the interviewee for accepting to participate. Also assure them of the confidentiality of the information that would be provided).

- If we could start by you telling me how the idea of fostering privately all started.
- Who was or were involved in this decision?
- Since we are going to talk about the children you look after, may I know how many people live in this house? and their ages as well;
- Did you look after other children b/4 now?
- How many children have you looked after since you started? Could you tell from which Country? How long have you been fostering black children?

MOTIVATIONS

- What made you think that you would like to look after children through private arrangements?
- So how did you get to know.....(name the child)
- How many times did you meet the child before he/she came to stay? Where did the meeting take place?
- What Information did you get about the child at the time of placement? Who gave the information?
- What did you do to help the child settle in your home?
- Did the parents tell you any of the child's native name?

- What are the things you would like to know more about the children?

LENGTH OF STAY;

- How long is the child expected to stay with you?

  a) Is there any agreement to that?

  b) Is it written?

  c) How long has the child been in your care now?

(D) What do you think parents usually mean when they ask you to look after their children?

PAYMENTS:

- What is the arrangement as regards payments for your looking after the child?
- How regular is the payment?
- What would consider doing if payment ceased?

CARER'S PERCEPTION OF HER ROLES:

- When you made the decision to foster black children, what did you hope to gain from it?
- When you made the decision to do this, what did you expect to be doing for the children?
- How would you describe your experience?
- Has it worked out as well as you had anticipated?
- Is this experience related to a particular child(ren) or children of any particular ethnic origin?
- If asked to name five (5) things that have made you happy as a foster parent, what would you name?
- Where would you place your experience as a foster parent among the five most important things that have happened to you in life?

PEOPLE'S PERCEPTION OF HER:

- What do people think about you being a foster parent?
- What about members of your extended family?
- What sorts of things would you describe as the actual attitude or behaviour that you had to deal with?
- Is it often too difficult to look after children of certain ages?
- What problems have you had with .....(name the child)?
- What age in children do you most enjoy?
- Is or are these child(ren) the sort of children you would ideally want to look after?
- What situation do you find most difficult to deal with in this situation?
- How would you feel about any member of your family becoming a foster parent some day?

RELATIONSHIP WITH SOCIAL SERVICES:

Now if we could talk about your Relationship with the SSD;

- How often does a social worker visit you? and how useful do you find such visits?
- Did you notify the SSD B/4 or after the child(ren) have arrived?
- How did you discover that you had to inform SSD about any child you look after?
- Do you think that Social workers should visit families like yours and why?
- It could be a very demanding task looking after these kids, what sorts of support would you most welcomed from the SSD?
- Have you heard about the 19989 children's Act?
- How well do you know about this law?
- What roles do you think social workers can play in promoting the welfare of these children?
- Have you ever applied to be a L.A foster carer, and what was the outcome?

- What is your opinion about the suggestion to register all private foster carers?

A) Why do you say that?

SUPPORT NETWORK: (USE ECOMAP AT THIS POINT):

(A) From which particular group do get your strongest support?

ON PARENTAL SKILLS:

I will now want us to talk about what you actually do as a foster parent;

- Could you please tell me about what you actually do as a parent?
- Does one need to have any special skills to foster; and what are these skills do you think?
- What skills have assisted you to look after these child(ren) the most?
- COULD YOU PLEASE TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR CHILDHOOD? WHAT EXPERIENCES IN ALL THESE DO YOU THINK HAVE HELPED YOU TO LOOK AFTER THE CHILD(REN) ? (0R NAME THE CHILD).
- Would you say all children develop the same way whatever their race or where they come from?
- At what age would you like to have children fostered if their parents cannot bring them up? Why do you say so?
- How would you describe the way you regard the children while they are in your household?
- what do you regard as your duty to give to your foster child?
- What would you regard as the needs of a black child growing in a white family?
- How would you feel when this child(ren) have to leave you back to their birth parents? Why is this so?
- Are you in contact with any of the children that you have fostered in the past?
- What would you say about the suggestion that carers should be discouraged from contact with the children who are no longer in their care?

ON RACE,ETHNICITY, AND CULTURE:

- What would you say to the suggestion that if a child has to be fostered out, such a child should be fostered with people of the same race, culture or religion?
- Why do you say so?
- What do you do to help the children keep in touch with their own culture?
- How important do you think is culture to a child?
- Have any of the children you have looked after in the past or presently, shown any negative attitude to Black people?
- If yes, how did you help the child to overcome this problem?
- Have any of them experienced any racist taunt or name-calling?
- How did you help them to cope with the experience?
- What do you regard as racism, and do you think racism is a problem in Britain today?

ROLES OF FOSTER FATHERS OR MALE PARTNERS:

Could we talk about what you as the foster father do in the whole situation?

- What is your opinion about private fostering generally and your wife doing it?
- What do you think or regard you can give to these children in your home?
- What do you see as your contribution toward making a success of your family's fostering role?
- What do you actually do to assist your wife to look after the children and how often do you do these?
- What do you expect that the children would have gained from being brought up in your home?

- Who among you always raise problems about the child(ren) with Social Services Department?
- What inconveniences have you experienced as a result of looking after the child?
- For how long would he continue to allow his house to be used for the care of foster children?
- What will make you stop?
- With whom does the child spend his/her leisure time?
- Who helps with homework?

ON CORRECTION,

- What sorts of things would you correct the child for doing and who usually does it?
- What forms does it usually take?
- Do you smack the child(ren) at all?
- Under what circumstances would you smack the child?

PARENTAL CONTACT:

Now I would want us to talk about how the children (or name the child) keep contact with his/her parents or relatives

- Would you like to say something on whether the child(ren) maintain any form of contact with their parents?
- Any visit? Who does it and how often?
- Does the child(ren) keep anything that their parents gave them, which will remind them of their family background?

- Is the child always left alone with the parents when they visit? WHY do you think this is necessary?
- How long does the visit usually last?
- How would you describe the last visit? Is this typical.
- How does that visit or contact affects the child?
- Would you say that it is appropriate for the parents to continue to visit or contact the child?
- Are there circumstances that you would consider discouraging the parents from further contact or visiting?
- If you were asked to describe the parents in your own words, what would you say?
- Where do the child(ren) parents presently live? do you know?
- How often do you meet their fathers?
- As at the time they placed .....(name the child) with you, what did they say was the reason for the placement?

NATURAL FAMILY LOYALTY OR ATTACHMENT:

Now I would like to talk to you about the child's attachment to you and his parents or other members of his extended family.

- How would you describe how the child has settled in this house?
- Is there any one person among his/her birth parents that the child is fond of?
- Does the child knows that you are not his/her natural parent?
- Have you explain to the child why he/she is not staying with his/her birth parents?
- How would you describe the child's Relationship with his/her/her birth parents or any member of it.?

- If you were to describe how the child feels about this arrangement, how would you describe it?
- Where do you think the child would go if he/she were to leave your home?
- Where have the children you have looked after gone to after they had left your home?
- What advise would you give to people who want to start looking after children through private arrangement?
- What aspect of private fostering would you like to see changes in?

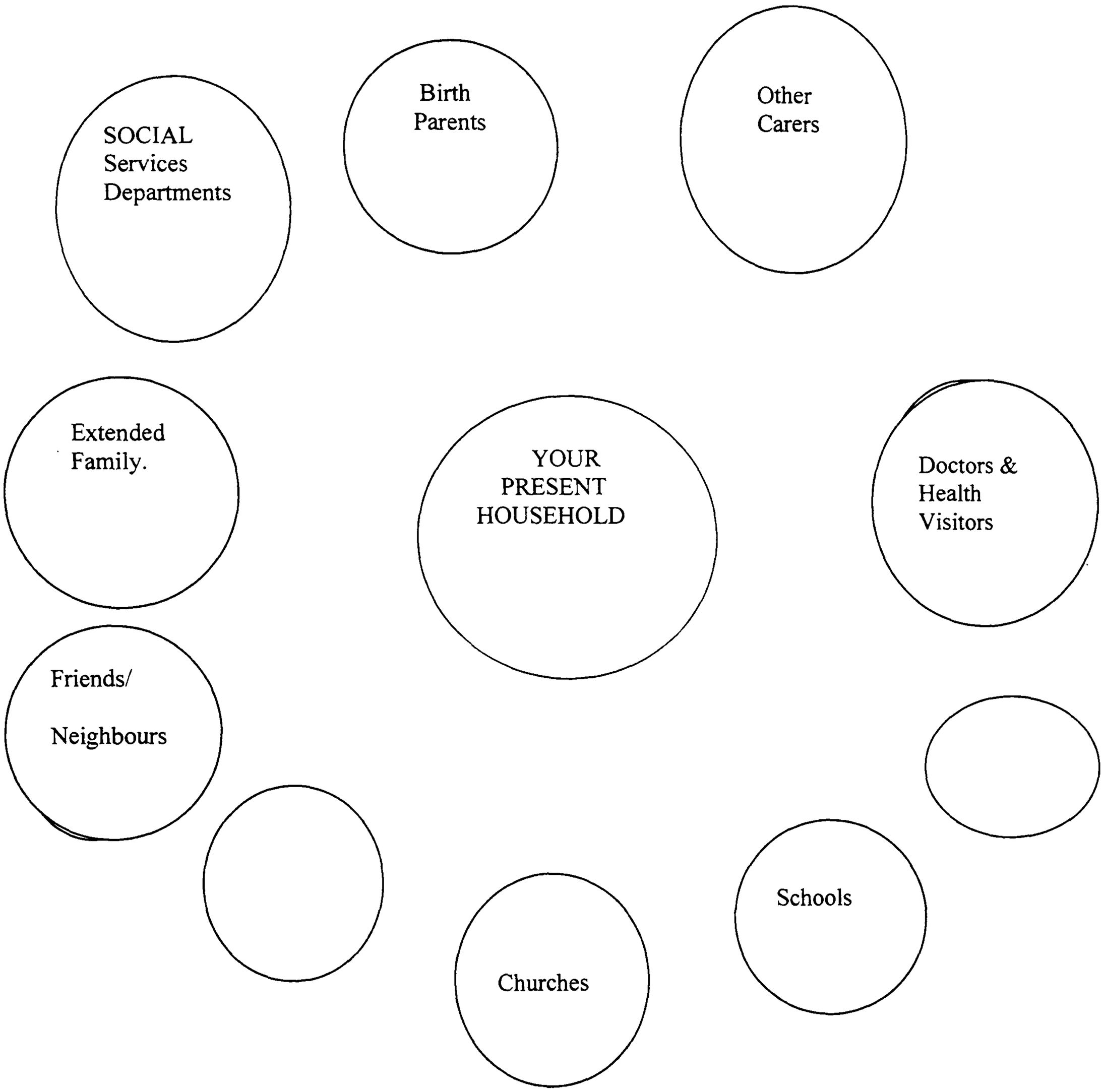
*** DO YOU KNOW OTHER PEOPLE WHO ARE ALSO LOOKING AFTER CHILDREN THROUGH PRIVATE ARRANGEMENT AND WHO WOULD WANT TO TALK TO ME ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES AS WELL?

IN ORDER TO HELP ME INTERPRET THE INFORMATION YOU HAVE GIVEN ME, I WOULD LIKE TO ASK SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT YOU PLEASE; (REFER TO BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET).

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR KIND CO-OPERATION.

APPENDIX SIX:

ECOMAP FOR INTERVIEWS WITH FOSTER CARERS:



KEY: **1** ——————— **Strong support or Relationship.**
2 — — — **Tenuous (Hostile).**
3 ..... **Insignificant Relationship.**
4 ——————→ **Direction of support.**

APPENDIX SEVEN

Department of Health

2000/0337

Thursday 8th June 2000

CRACKDOWN ON PRIVATE FOSTERING REGULATIONS

Health Minister, John Hutton. today announced new measures for the safety of privately fostered children - children who are placed. by their parents. with families or people they are not related to.

A letter, sent today, by the Chief inspector of the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) to all councils, will reiterate reponsibilities for children who have been fostered privately and will ask councils to review whether they are fulfilling their responsibilities to safeguard the welfare of such children.

Further key actions include:

- An SSI inspection (between December 2000 and March 2001) to collect more detailed information about existing services and examples of good practice.

- An awareness campaign during 2001 to encourage carers and parents to contact their local council about children being cared for.

Mr Hutton said:

"Despite the fact that legislation exists, it is evident that many councils are not complying with regulations and guidance on this matter.

"Just because a child has been fostered privately, it does not mean the local council has no responsibilty for their safety and well-being.

"Indeed, privately fostered children may be particularly vulnerable so it is vital that councils have proper arrangements to actively seek out these children and provide them with the support they may need.

"Past inspection work has shown that regulation and guidance in this area is not being adhered to and this must change."

Mr Hutton concluded:

"The legislation is there for a purpose and must be used. Children who are being fostered privately deserve the same support as that given to those fostered within the sysytem."

APPENDIX EIGHT

From the Chief Inspector, Denise Platt CBE

SSI Social Services Inspectorate

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London
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denise.platt@doh.gsi.gov.uk
Tel: 020 7972 4300

CI(2000)9

June 2000

Dear Director

Privately Arranged Fostering Placements – Your Council's Responsibilities

I am writing to remind you of your council's responsibilities for supervising children placed, by their parents, with families or individuals unrelated to them. These responsibilities are covered by Section 67 of the Children Act 1989.

This reminder results from recent concerns raised during the passage of the Care Standards Bill in the House of Lords. Peers requested a new registration system to protect privately fostered children. However we already have legislation to deal with this through Section 67 provided it is properly enforced. But we know from past inspection work that many councils are not complying with regulation and guidance in this area.

Our SSI inspection report on private fostering ***Signposts***, which we published in 1994, identified major shortcomings in the system. We provided an information pack with the report that included briefing sheets and examples of forms and procedures. Unfortunately, I do not believe that many councils used this material to improve their services.

Because children who are privately fostered are potentially some of the most vulnerable, I want you to review whether your council is fulfilling its responsibilities to safeguard their welfare. If you do not have arrangements to actively seek out these children you may well be unaware of them as there is little incentive for private carers to make themselves known to you.

To ensure that the current legislation is effectively enforced, Ministers have asked us to take the following action:

- remind councils with social services responsibilities about their role in private fostering and ask you to ensure that your council is complying with legal requirements;

- undertake an inspection (between December 2000 and March 2001) to collect more detailed information about existing services. This will identify good practice and provide advice to councils on how to develop their own services;

- to run an awareness campaign during 2001 to encourage carers and parents to contact their 'host' council about children being cared for.

It is important that you have robust arrangements in place before the awareness campaign next year.

You may find it helpful to refer back to the ***Signposts*** publication as you review how well your council is complying with the legislation and guidance. Free copies can be obtained from:

DH Publications
PO Box 777
London
SE1 6XH

Fax: 01623-724 524
E-mail: doh@prologistics.co.uk
NHS Responseline: 0541 555 455

Please quote CI(2000)9 for this letter www.doh.gov.uk/coinh.htm
Please quote CI(94)34 for the ***Signposts*** publication

(The text of the ***Signposts*** report and briefing sheets is available on our web site at www.doh.gov.uk/scg/signposts.htm)

Yours sincerely

Denise Platt CBE